



The cover features a male protagonist with black hair and a slight smile, wearing a white shirt and green overalls, holding a silver revolver. A female character with blonde hair and a surprised expression is leaning against him, wearing a white blouse with a red cross and an orange skirt. The background shows a lush green landscape with a stone wall and a large white structure.

MY UNIQUE SKILL MAKES ME OP LEVEL 1

EVEN AT

1

Nazuna Miki

Art by Subachi



The book cover features a male protagonist with dark hair and a green vest over a white shirt, holding a silver revolver. A female character with blonde hair and an orange dress is leaning against him. The background shows a stone wall and greenery.

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**"YOU
CAN
HAVE
THIS,
TOO."**

I TOOK IT
AND SIPPED.
THE UMAMI
FROM THE
BEAN SPROUTS
AND THE
WARMTH OF
THE SOUP
SPREAD
THROUGH MY
BODY.

Ryota Sato

Once an employee at a toxic company, he woke up to find that he'd been transported to another world.

Emily

A girl who wields a hammer. When she defeated a slime, out popped Ryota.



"HAAAAAAH!"

EMILY LEAPED FORWARD,
JUMPING OFF OF THE
SIXTY-FOOT CLIFF, AND
SWUNG HER HAMMER DOWN
WITH ALL HER MIGHT!

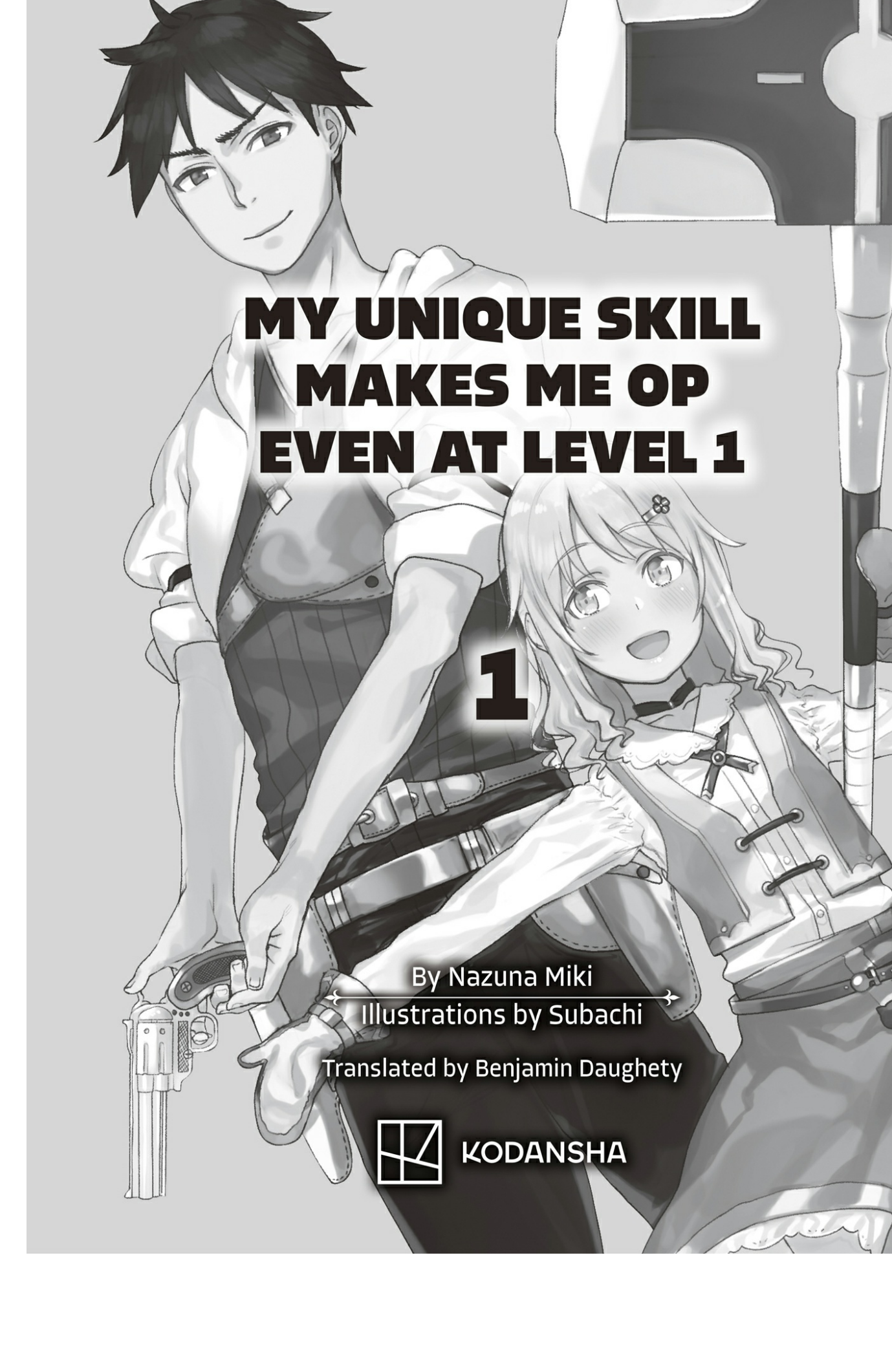
POW!



"SO HE'S
NOT A
MAGE?"

"WHOA!
HE DOWNED
THAT GUY
IN ONE
PUNCH."

"THAT
GUY'S
POWER
WAS THE
REAL DEAL,
BUT THIS
MAN JUST
BEAT HIS
BUTT..."



MY UNIQUE SKILL MAKES ME OP EVEN AT LEVEL 1

1

By Nazuna Miki

Illustrations by Subachi

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KODANSHA

My Unique Skill Makes Me OP Even at Level 1, 1

A VERTICAL Book

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KODANSHA

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01. The Man Dropped by a Slime

Driiing!

An airy, whimsical sound effect reached my ears. And as my vision cleared, a lone thought rose to the forefront of my mind.

Sounds like a video game sound effect.

Though my mind was clear, I didn't want to open my eyes. Essentially, I felt sleepy and wanted five more minutes in bed.

Poke, poke... Squish, squish...

Somebody poked my cheek. The fingertip was soft and tiny, meaning it probably belonged to a little girl.

"Are you...human? No, wait, you're a monster drop. Human-shaped meat, maybe? Let's try cutting off a piece..."

"Hooold up!" I roared, then quickly jumped up and out of "bed" at the horrifying proposition.

Before me was a stoic girl—a tiny one, who looked even smaller as she squatted in front of me. Standing at about 4'3", with slender arms and legs, she looked light enough for me to pick up with one hand. However, I noticed an enormous hammer-like weapon next to her. It was clearly longer than I was tall—almost seven feet, in fact.

As youthful as the girl appeared, her face had a mature air to it. The incongruity of it all was rather charming, honestly.

“You really surprised me there,” she said. “Are you actually human?”

“Of course I am! Isn’t it obvious?!”

“Why would a person drop from a slime?”

“Bwuh?! Drop? Slime?”

What is she going on about?

This tiny girl was using video game slang like it was normal. And to describe me, no less. “Drop from a slime” was a very video-gamey phrase. Was she one of those people who couldn’t tell the difference between video games and reality? I could certainly sympathize; real life was a crappy, merciless game with no do-overs.

“Yes, that is what I said,” she confirmed. “You were dropped by a slime. Oh, more accurately, you came from a rare slime bro.”

“Uh, are you all right in the head?”

“Why do you look at me with such pity in your eyes?”

“I mean, no normal person would talk about ‘slimes’ and ‘drops.’”

“You really don’t know, do you?” she asked cautiously, her eyes still fixed on me.

“Know what?”

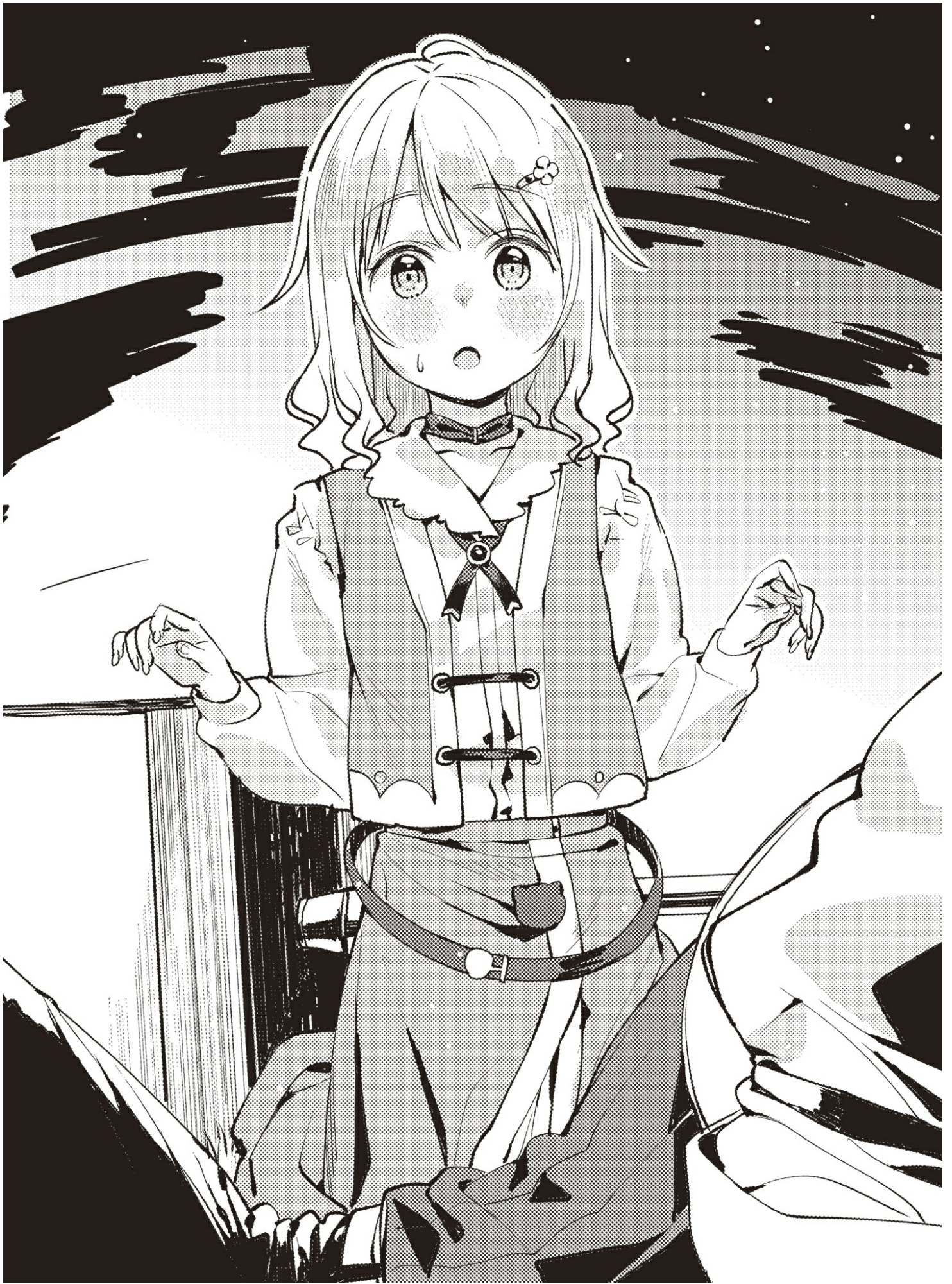
Huh? What’s going on? Am I the one in the wrong? Am I the one who deserves pity? Hahaha, surely not! Surely...not, right?

“Can you explain?” I asked, hesitant.

“Erm... Aha. One’s shown up at just the perfect time. Watch this,” the girl said, lifting her seven-foot-long hammer like it was nothing. For a moment, I

wondered if it was paper-mâché or something.

This was my first opportunity to take a good look around. We were in a dim chamber with brick walls. Some spots on the walls glowed faintly. At a glance, it seemed like some sort of underground passage.



A round object had appeared at the bend up ahead, translucent green and the size of a cushion. The thing approached, squishing down flat with each bounce.

“A slime?” I gasped.

Round, irregularly-shaped, translucent jelly that moved like a living thing. It was just like the slimes in video games.

Why is a slime here? What is this, some amusement park haunted house?

As I thought that to myself, the slime launched itself forward. It flew off the walls and ceiling like a bouncy ball, making its way toward the girl.

“Watch out!” I shouted. However, the girl didn’t move.

The slime slammed into her from the side, causing her to reel back. It looked like a hell of an impact from where I was standing, like an elementary school student getting clocked by a soccer ball. Though she reeled back, she regained her balance.

“That’s a weapon, isn’t it?! Fight back!”

“I’m...”

The slime leaped again, but this time, it was rushing her down from the front.

“...just fine!”

Seizing the opportunity, she swung her hammer down.

Pow!

With earth-shattering force, she slammed her weapon into the slime—landing a clean hit. When she lifted the hammer again, the slime had been crushed. Now it was merely a sad puddle of pudding on the ground.

After being crushed, the slime slowly thinned out and disappeared. And once it was all gone...

We got a bean sprout!

“Why a bean sprout?!” I yelped.

“Bean sprouts are what come out of the slimes on B1 of Tellurium,” the girl explained, like that knowledge was the most obvious thing in the world. “How do you not know such basic knowledge?”

“Basic to who, exactly?!”

What’s going on? What in the world is this?

A little girl bashed a slime with a hammer, which then dropped a bean sprout. All of this had happened underground. I could not have been more confused if I’d tried. If I was twitting about this moment, I’d be posting that “visible confusion” meme.



“Have you calmed down?”

“Y-Yeah... Thanks. This bean sprout soup is good.”

I thanked the girl who had started a fire and made bean sprout soup from the single sprout that the slime had dropped.

“Uh, what’s your name?”

“I’m Emily Brown.”

“Ryota Sato. It’s nice to meet you.”

“...Hello, Yoda?”

“*Ryota Sato!*” I repeated my name, sounding it out carefully for her. “I’m not some sci-fi character!”

“I’m sorry. I’ve just never heard a name like that before.”

“Hey, are we...not in Japan?”

“Japan?” she mumbled, tilting her head.

“We’re...on Earth, right?”

“Earth?” she mumbled, her head tilting further.

Shit... This is really bad.

Alarm bells blared in my head. We were making dangerously little sense to each other. Add in the fact that the slime had dropped a bean sprout of all things, and I was starting to have a bad feeling about this.

“So,” I began. “You said this bean sprout was...dropped by that slime?”

“That is correct,” Emily confirmed.

“Is that how bean sprouts are made?”

“Not just bean sprouts, everything.”

“Everything?”

“Every single thing in this world comes from monsters in dungeons.”

Emily looked at me in confusion, as if to ask, *You don’t even know that?*

“Every...single thing?”

“Yes.”

“Define everything.”

“Everything means everything.”

Her confusion intensified. I knew that reaction well. It was like when someone asked you so many dumb questions that you had no idea where to even begin. My face often ended up in that state when I had to explain things to not-so-smart clients.

I knew I would only bother her if I asked her for a lecture, so I tried a different approach.

“Do other vegetables come from them, too?”

“Yes.”

“How about meat? Like beef, pork, and lamb?”

“Yes.”

“Even metals and gems?”

“I hear the rare monsters at the very bottom of this dungeon drop pearls sometimes. Very odd, since it’s a vegetable dungeon.”

“Well, surely that doesn’t include air and water, right?”

“Of course it does,” Emily replied, cocking her head inquisitively.

It was then that another slime appeared. Emily took her hammer in hand and stood to face the enemy. Like before, after taking one of its attacks, the girl smashed it to little pieces. This time, however, it didn’t drop a bean sprout. Instead, the slime’s carcass simply sizzled and disappeared.

Emily returned with a proud grin on her face and declared, “See for yourself.”

“See...what?”

“Before, people assumed monsters occasionally didn’t drop things. However,

recent research suggests that they're actually dropping air or water, so, umm..."

She paused. After a moment of thinking through the best way to put it, she finally said, "Everything in this world comes from drops in dungeons."



I ended up following Emily around after that, trying to get my mind straight all the while.

Let's try this again: my name is Ryota Sato. I'm an office worker at a toxic company, but that's not what's important right now. What is important is that my common sense doesn't apply in this place. Or, rather...this world?

To summarize the information that I dragged out of Emily, this world had dungeons all over the place. Everything in the world was obtained by defeating the monsters that inhabited them. When asked about agriculture and fishing, she simply responded, "This is agriculture," in the most matter-of-fact tone. In other words, killing slimes for bean sprouts—*farming* them, one might say—was this world's version of agriculture.

Seriously... What in the world?

No matter how much I thought about it, it didn't make sense. My head started to hurt. Thus, knowing that I'd make no pro-gress, I gave up thinking. It was then that I realized something.

"Emily, you've been beating up nothing but slimes this whole time. Do you ever fight anything else?"

"B1 of Tellurium only has slimes," she replied.

“Calling it B1 implies that there’s a second,” I noted. “Why don’t we go there? I bet that hammer of yours could beat down some other monsters.”

“I’m weak,” Emily explained with a calm smile on her face.

“You don’t look weak.”

“I’m clumsy,” she elaborated. “Against stronger enemies, I tend to miss or get beaten up before I can fight back.”

“Oh. So you have the power, but not the speed, huh?”

Emily nodded.

She’s one of those types, then. That is a shame.

“But bean sprouts taste good. Plus, they fill my belly,” Emily continued. “On luckier days, I can even sell the extras for a profit.”

“You don’t get stronger at all?”

“If I level up two more times, maybe I could go down to B2.”

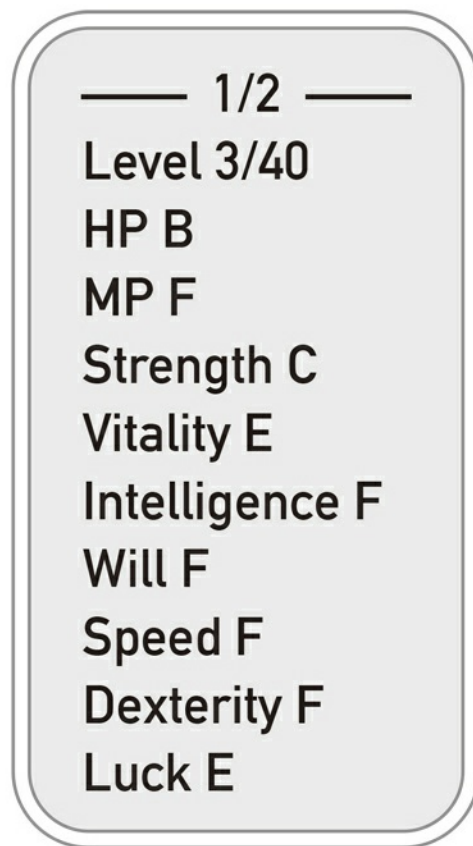
“Level up? You’ve got levels here, too?”

“Yes. Oh, perfect. Look over here.” Emily stopped and turned to the side. There was a sort of blackboard hanging on the wall of the passage.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“It’s called a status board. Do this and...”

When she placed her hand on it, characters covered the thing.



“Explain,” I urged.

“These are my stats.”

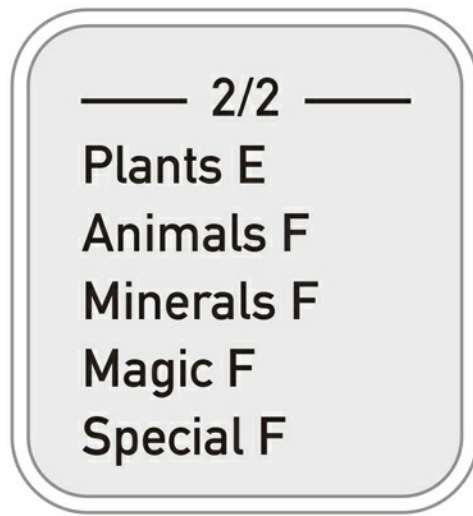
“It really is like a video game...” I muttered, staring at it.

Emily truly had a clichéd brawler build.

“This allows you to check your stats,” she explained. “As a dungeon, Tellurium is quite an important place. These boards are hung up all over it so that you can check your stats at any time. It’s incredible, isn’t it? Doing this in town would cost a hundred piro.”

“So it’s like a free public service, huh?” I mused. Then, I happened to notice the 1/2 at the top of her stats. “So this is the first page, or whatever? Is there a second page?”

“Yes,” Emily answered. Then she operated the so-called status board, switching pages. “These are my drop stats.”



“Drop stats...? What happens as those go up?”

“High drop stats make drops more plentiful. My plants stat is the highest, so I spend all my time here in Tellurium.”

“Interesting.”

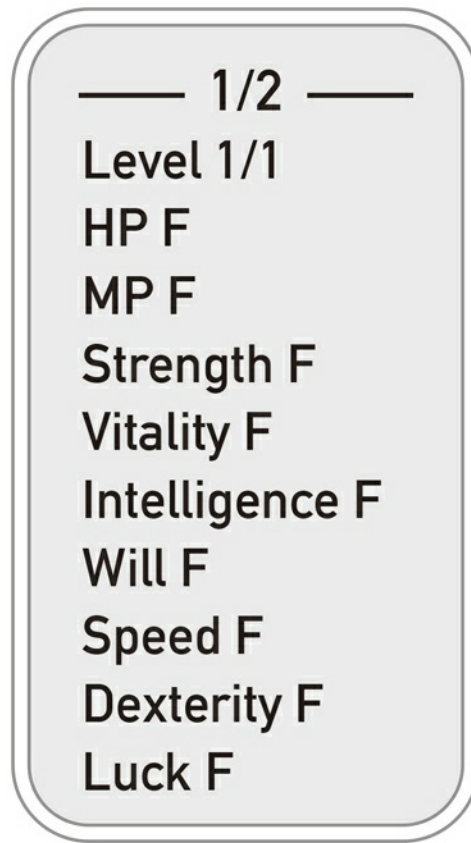
Emily had said that her plants stat was the highest, but it wasn’t actually high by any means. Of the five, one was E, while the others were all F. It was the best of the bunch, but still terrible overall.

“Would you like to try, Yoda?”

“It’s Ryota,” I corrected her. “Anyway, do I just touch it?”

“Yep.”

Emily retracted her hand. Then, I touched the status board just as she had. Like before, stats appeared.



Hey! What the hell, man?! Seriously?!

"Yoda, you're very weak..."

"Depressingly weak, yeah. And look here, at my level. Does that mean I can never go past level 1?"

"That does seem to be the case."

"Whoa, now..."

Isn't that a little too mean?

"Ugh... I feel stupid for getting my hopes up."

As I sighed, Emily reached out and touched the status board.

"Your drop stats are pitiful, too."

Wowww! So my drops are gonna suck, too. Maaan...

I was truly a good-for-nothing human being. Unable to raise my level, unable to improve my crappy stats. Good. For. Nothing.

“Umm, A, B, C, D, E, F...” Emily counted on her fingers.

God, are they that bad?

“Q, R, S... There. Wow, that’s very low.”

“Huh?”

Something in my brain said, *Hold it. This smells fishy*, so I looked back up to the status board.



And indeed, the second page of my stats was truly a sight to behold.

02. Starting My New Life

“With stats this low, you may not be able to receive any drops,” Emily diagnosed.

“Wait a second. Is S considered low here?”

“Huh? I mean, in alphabetical order...” she trailed off as she began counting on her fingers once more.

Sure, S was pretty darn deep in the alphabet, so thinking it meant a low ranking wasn’t necessarily illogical. But in my experience—the lived experience of someone who’d played games all his life—S was above A.

Once again, I checked the board.



Is this a blessing or a curse?

From my perspective, it was top-tier. I looked like some sort of hacked character with S in every stat. But Emily said that it was low. So then, which one of us was right?

“Let’s try it out,” I declared, looking around. To confirm my drop rates, I

would need to defeat a monster. A slime, no doubt. And in order to do that, I would need a weapon. Unfortunately, there was no way I would just find a decent weapon randomly in a dungeon.

I'll settle for a stick at this point.

“What are you looking for?” Emily asked.

“I want to check whether an S drop rate is good or not, so I need a weapon.”

“Would you like to use mine?” she asked, offering me her enormous hammer.

I accepted.

“Urgh!”

The hammer dragged me down, almost making me fall over. I attempted to lift the weapon. I put my hips into it, gritting my teeth, but no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't lift it.

“This must be two hundred pounds!”

“I-I'm sorry!” Emily apologized, picking up the hammer. With one hand, at that!

I shuddered. A cute little girl, who was only 4'3", was lifting that behemoth with one hand. She'd been swinging it around before, too! My spine froze from terror and my inner thighs were soaked in cold sweat.

Heedless of my sheer fright, Emily whipped a green pole out of her bag and asked, “How about something like this?”

On closer inspection, it wasn't quite a pole. It was knobby, with a sharpened end: a bamboo spear. I accepted it very carefully this time, but luckily, it was just normal bamboo.

After taking a second to get used to its weight and thickness, I declared, “This

ought to do.”

“A slime has arrived,” Emily said, pointing to the side. One slime had appeared at the far end of the underground passage.

Boing, boing, boing...

It bounced my way like a rubber ball. I readied my bamboo spear. As the saying went, the early bird kills the slime. I leaped out to attack. Lowering my stance, I thrust out the spear horizontally. It pierced through the slime with ease, yet the sensation in my hands was...odd.

With a spear stabbed straight through its body, the slime stopped moving, melted, and dripped to the floor. Eventually, its carcass disappeared and it dropped bean sprouts. Enough to fill a five-pound pack of bean sprouts you’d see at a grocery store, even!

“W-Wooowww!” Emily gasped. “I’ve never seen so many drop at once.”

“You said a higher drop stat means more drops, right?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“How many do you normally get?”

“Umm...”

At that exact moment, a slime appeared from the opposite direction. Emily held her hammer aloft and waited for the enemy. After she withstood a hit from the side, the slime slowed down for a moment and she splattered it across the ground. Get hit, then attack; Emily had gone through the same process with the other slimes.

The crushed slime disappeared and once again gifted her with bean sprouts. This time, she got...about enough to fill a 30-yen pack—those ones a person

could get for only ten yen when they were on sale. That was less than my drops by a factor of ten.

“About this much,” she finally answered.

“I got more. Have you ever seen that many at once?”

“Nope. In my two years of experience on B1 of Tellurium, I’ve never seen that happen.”

“Damn... That means S must be better than A, right?”

“Why would that be? That’s dumb,” Emily stated as she raised an eyebrow.

“It’s just how it works.”

Don’t ask me why. For whatever reason, S is better than A. Speaking of, some games have SS and SSS as well.

And so, I asked, “Emily, have you ever seen an S rating before?”

“No, nor have I heard of them,” she confirmed. “It’s common sense that A is the best you can get.”

“I see...”

I can’t prove it, but SS and SSS probably aren’t a thing here.

My drop rates were all S. For a moment there, I thought I would be forced to live a hellish life in which I was never rewarded for my work.

In my relief, I realized that I was hungry.

Grrrr!

My stomach’s growls echoed through the cavern. I glanced at Emily. It was a little embarrassing to have that happen in front of a girl.

“Shall we eat?” she suggested with a motherly smile.



We built a fire and heated water in a pot in that very same spot.

“So there’s water in this cave?” I asked, glancing at a puddle in the distance.

“When you defeat a monster and get nothing—like when slimes don’t drop bean sprouts—air and water are dropped instead.”

“Oh, yeah. You *did* mention that.”

“It gathers inside the cave,” Emily added.

“I can see that.”

Before long, the water came to a boil and Emily got to cooking. After dropping in some slime-sourced bean sprouts, she pulled out some garlic chives from her bag and tore them into bite-sized pieces. Once both of those ingredients had spent about ten seconds in the pot, she lowered the heat and seasoned the dish with chili oil and other garnishes.

Her motions were skilled, but at the same time, she seemed to be cutting corners somehow. But hey, we were cooking outside—or, er, in a dungeon—so I knew I couldn’t expect a gourmet meal.

“Here you go.”

I accepted one of the bean sprouts and tossed it into my mouth.

Delicious!

The crispy texture of the bean sprouts paired well with the slight spiciness of the chili oil dressing. Juicy sweetness and spiciness had mixed well into one

flavor.

“This would go great with alcohol,” I mused.

“Would it?” Emily asked.

“Have you never had alcohol?”

“It’s too expensive.”

I decided to ignore her depressing answer and went back to eating my bean sprouts. They were exceptional. I could eat them forever.

Meanwhile, Emily was cooking something else. It was bean sprout soup again, but this time, made from the wealth of bean sprouts dropped by my slime. The steam rising from the bountiful mix of red and green spices and white sprouts truly stimulated my appetite.

“You can have this, too,” she offered.

I took it and sipped. The umami from the bean sprouts and the warmth of the soup spread through my body. And at the same time...they touched my heart. Before I knew it, I was crying.

“Wh-Whaaat?! Y-Yoda, what’s wrong? You’re crying... Was it that bad?”

“No, that’s not it,” I replied, wiping away my tears. “It’s just that it’s been such a long time since I’ve eaten a warm meal with someone.”

Lately, I’d been eating alone all the time. I’d head into the office extra early, then stay late into the night, working unpaid overtime and shoveling down convenience store food whenever I had five minutes to myself. Eventually, I’d worked myself so thoroughly to the bone that I ended up in the hospital.

I sipped the bean sprout soup again.

Mmm, that’s good!

“Thank—”

As I looked up and tried to thank her, my vision went black. At the same time, soft warmth enveloped me. For a moment, I had no idea what was happening.

“Yoda,” Emily said, her voice ringing out from above me. I realized now that, for the first time, a girl had hugged me. This 4’3” girl had pulled *me* into a hug. “I once heard that people’s efforts will inevitably be rewarded. It may be sooner, or it may be later, but everyone who works hard will find their happiness.”

“That’s not—” I began to protest, but was interrupted once more.

“Furthermore,” Emily continued, now stroking the back of my head. “The longer you go without being rewarded, the better the reward will be. It’s like pushing your pointer finger against your thumb when you’re about to pluck something. The longer you push, the harder the pluck. That’s why the most incredible of us are rewarded in the next life.”

“...”

“I think you did your very best, Yoda, so all you have to do now is wait to be rewarded,” Emily whispered, her voice full of maternal affection.

Before I knew it, I was hugging her back, clinging to her waist like my life depended on it.



Our meal ended and I...gradually pulled myself back together.

“By the way, is it daytime? Or night?”

"I think it's nighttime by now," Emily said. "That meal was my third today, so it should be dinner."

"Guess we'll have to find a place to sleep soon."

"If you're looking for an inn, there's a town right outside the dungeon."

"I see," I replied as I stood up and moved toward the exit.

However, my guide showed no signs of moving, so I asked, "Are you going to beat up more monsters?"

"I should be getting to bed, too."

"Bed? Er, aren't you going home?"

"I live in this dungeon. My drop rates are so low that I can't afford a place to stay. It's my dream to rent an apartment one day."

Emily's response was the saddest thing I'd ever heard. I mean, didn't that make her homeless? If not literally so, it was close. Thinking back, she *had* pulled pots and seasonings from that luggage of hers. At first, I'd thought she was just a well-equipped camper, but...

"...I see."

I gathered my resolve and stood up.

"Yoda, you should take this."

"The bamboo spear? Are you sure?"

"It's dangerous to go without a weapon," Emily said, smiling sweetly all the while. Her kindness and consideration touched me more and more.

"Okay," I agreed. "I'll *borrow* it. But I promise to return it."

"Sure. You can find me here on B1 of Tellurium."

“Got it,” I replied, leaving the dungeon for the moment.



In town, I gathered the minimum necessary information and sold the bean sprouts I had obtained. Along the way, I learned a few things.

First off, the unit of currency in this world was called a “piro.” The supermarket pack-sized pile of bean sprouts was worth 200 piro, a night at a cheap inn was 2,000 piro, and a bowl of ramen-like stuff was 500 piro. There were some incongruities here and there, but I could more or less see piro as equivalent to yen.

Knowing that, as well as the prices of what I wanted, I returned to B1 of Tellurium. Once there, I mercilessly hunted down slimes. Each time I received bean sprouts, I would take them to town, sell them, come back, and hunt down more slimes. When I got tired, I’d just plop down and sleep on the spot. The dungeon floor was hard, but it wasn’t all that different from sleeping under my desk at work, so I didn’t mind.

Sleep, transport, cash out. I repeated that cycle multiple times.

Day 1: 5,123 piro.

Day 2: 4,970 piro.

Day 3: 10,210 piro, as I had been blessed by the drop gods.

I’d only gotten one hour of sleep over the span of three days, but I’d done my best and achieved my goal. 20,000 piro-slash-yen in three days of work.

With that...



The agricultural city of Cyclo contained tens of thousands of people who were supported by five dungeons. On its outskirts was a certain rickety 87-year-old apartment. I had taken Emily there.

“What’s this place?” she asked.

“I’ve rented it out. Took me three whole days of earnings.”

“Only three days?! That’s incredible, Yoda!”

“Well, it’s old, so I didn’t have to pay key money or a security deposit,” I replied with a shrug. “This was the best I could do in three days.”

“It’s still wonderful. How much is it?”

“Twenty thousand piro a month.”

“Twenty thousand... Oh my,” Emily mumbled as she looked around the room. Her eyes were full of envy.

It wasn’t a good room by any stretch of the imagination, but for an 87-year-old room that cost 20,000 piro a month, it wasn’t half-bad.

“So yeah, here’s the key,” I said.

“Okay. Why do you want me to have it?”

“Because this is home now.”

“Whose?” Emily asked, cocking her head.

“Yours.”

“Huuuh?! ”

“Don’t worry,” I assured. “I’ll pay rent next month and the month after that.”

“N-No, I couldn’t possibly—”

“It’s my way of thanking you for the soup.”

“...”

The girl looked at me in silent disbelief.

“It was warm and delicious.”

“...”

“Just wanted to thank you for it. It’s not a great room, but I hope you like it.”

After staring at me for quite some time, Emily slowly replied, “Okay.”

I was relieved and overjoyed that I could pay her back for the soup.

“Well, I’d better get going—”

Right as I turned around and started to leave, she pulled at my clothes and stopped me.

Emily?

“Your hands...are covered in calluses,” she said.

“Huh? Oh, sorry. That bamboo spear I borrowed might have some blood from popped blisters on it, but I’ll wash it well before I return it to you.”

“And you have bags under your eyes.”

“Still? Haha, well, you’re not really working until you’re too tired to have bags.”

When you stay up all night, strangely, they tend to disappear quickly.

“...”

“Emily?”

She’s gone silent. What’s wrong?

As I wondered what was wrong, she looked me right in the eye and said, “I’ll make soup.”

“Okay. I guess I’ll take a bowl—”

“I’ll make it over and over, so let’s eat it together.”

“Huh? A-Are you...?”

Before I knew it, she’d taken my hands. She was looking at me with those same loving, motherly eyes as before. I had a feeling I knew what she meant to say. Though I had to wonder if she knew what she was doing.

“Okay?”

She smiled sweetly, prompting me to agree. As such, Emily and I shackled—er, started living together. As friends, of course.

03. The Wall Between S and A-Rank

The next day, after another trek through B1 of Tellurium, I hauled all of the bean sprouts I'd obtained back to Cyclo's own Swallow's Returned Favor purchasing shop. As usual, the place was packed.

In this world, all things were dropped by monsters in dungeons. What I'd called primary industries in my old world—institutions which provided raw materials—were replaced by dungeons, adventurers, and purchasing shops like this one.

Towns and cities were always close to dungeons, and they were full of adventurers and purchasing shops. Such shops were the purveyors of this prosperity. If you thought about it, it was a really interesting system. Or so I thought to myself as I searched for an open counter.

One employee had just finished negotiating with the previous customer, leaving their counter open. I headed for said counter. There, I was greeted with a smile by Erza Monsoon, an employee who had bought from me multiple times already. We were familiar faces to one another by now.

"Welcome!" she exclaimed. "Another big haul today, I see?"

"More or less. Thanks for all your help."

"Of course. Wait just a moment, erm..." Erza trailed off, trying to remember my name. "Yota Sato?"

"Ryota, actually."

"Oh, my apologies! Your name is just so different from everyone else's that

it's hard to remember."

"Sorry about that."

"No, no. I'm the one at fault," Erza replied, stuck her tongue out mischievously, and checked the bag atop the counter.

After weighing it, she calculated a price.

"So, let's see... 1,967 piro in all. You always bring us so many that I'm willing to bump it up to 2,000, though."

"Thanks. Bean sprouts don't really rake in the big bucks, do they?"

Given the time I'd spent in the dungeon, I was only making a bit over 1,000 piro per hour. Piro was about as valuable as yen, so it wasn't bad, but it wasn't exactly good, either. It was *heavenly* compared to my hundred hours of unpaid overtime per month, though.

"Maybe I should try B2 of Tellurium," I mused. "What's it like?"

"The monsters are sleep slimes, and they drop carrots," Erza answered.

"Carrots, huh?"

I imagined the sight of a slime being beaten to a pulp and suddenly spewing carrots. It was...too surreal. Totally normal in this world, though, apparently.

"Why don't you check out other dungeons?" she suggested. "Even on the first floors, you should earn more money than in Tellurium."

"What other dungeons are there?"

"Silicon, Arsenic... There are others, too."

"Those are some interesting names."

"Are they?" Erza asked, cocking her head.

Maybe they were normal to the people who lived here.



“Oh, but the newest dungeon has a rather difficult to pronounce name.”

“Newest? Do dungeons appear out of thin air?”

“Yes, they pop up on occasion.”

Erza cocked her head again, as if to say, *Everybody knows that.*

All right, then...

“What’s the name?” I asked.

“Umm... Niho—no, not quite. Nihonium, I believe it was?”

“Nihonium? That’s easy to pronounce.”

“For you, perhaps.”

I sort of liked the name. It sounded like a dumb Japanese kid had been tasked with coming up with a name for his rad new element.

“Its drops are being investigated by the Neptune family, so I’m certain we’ll have more details before long.”

“The Neptune family?” I repeated, urging her to explain.

“Haven’t you heard of them? They’re the most powerful organization in Cyclo. They have five people with A-rank plant drops!”

“Oh, wow! Do they bring lots of incredible plants and fruit to you, then?”

“Their drops are incredible, but our shop doesn’t see any of them,” Erza replied, smiling bitterly.

“Why not?”

“They handle large amounts of high-quality goods. I heard a rumor that they once brought hundreds of melons, each worth fifty thousand piro, from a dungeon in one trip. It was a full-on family outing.”

“Whoa!”

That was one hell of a story. I mean, what kind of melon could sell for 50,000 piro? Was it one of those super-expensive ones like a Yubari King or a Japanese muskmelon?

As Erza and I conversed, I happened to notice a line forming behind me. Other adventurers were waiting, irritation evident on their faces and items to sell in hand.

Whoops. My bad.

“Sorry. We got caught up chatting,” I explained. “I’d better go now. See you tomorrow.”

“Wait!”

When I turned to leave, Erza stopped me. I turned back to face her. For some reason, she was fidgeting.

“Hmm? Something wrong?”

“Ryota! D-Do you...like beer?”

“Beer?”

“Yes! There’s a new shop on the corner that sells delicious beer straight from the Lanthanum dungeon. I-I would love to go get some with you today!”

“Beer, huh?”

I didn’t mind beer. In fact, it was my favorite alcoholic beverage. But despite my taste for it...I only had 2,000 piro to my name. I wasn’t rich enough to go out for drinks. Besides, Emily was waiting at home.

“Sorry,” I answered. “I’ll have to pass today.”

“Oh, I see...”

“See you later.”

I tried to leave for real this time, but she stopped me once again.

“Oh, wait a moment! Take this.”

Erza pulled something akin to a ticket from behind the counter and handed it to me.

“Is this...a coupon?”

“Yep! This coupon will let you sell to us for a five percent bonus on your next visit.”

“You have stuff like this?”

“Yes, sir!” Erza replied, then winked and flashed me a mischievous smile. “Make sure we’re your number one choice for selling drops, okay?”

“Sure. Thank you,” I replied as I waved to Erza and left.

It was just as bustling outside, with throngs of people crossing in all directions.

The agricultural city Cyclo had five dungeons. Almost all of the dungeons’ monsters dropped what I knew as crops, so people with high plant drop rates gathered in the area. Tens of thousands of people lived in this city.

Normal citizens, and adventurers who went into dungeons to bring back vegetables—these two different types of people naturally intermingled in this mysterious cityscape.

I should buy some ingredients that would pair well with bean sprouts. As long as they’re less than 2,000 piro, anyway.

Thus, I began the leisurely stroll home down the city streets.



Back inside Swallow's Returned Favor, Erza stared at the door, clearly distraught.

"Aww, he rejected you. That's a shame," Ina, her coworker, mused from the counter next to hers.

"H-H-H-He didn't reject me!" Erza sputtered. "It's not like that, anyway!"

"Hahahaha! You can't hide it. The pain is written all over your face."

"It's not...like that..."

"Let me offer you some advice. When you ask a workaholic out to drinks, he'll think you're just getting drinks. Improve your approach or be more straightforward. Otherwise, he won't get it."

"But I said—"

"Whoops, a customer," Ina interrupted. "Welcome! Wowww, Eve, I see you've brought in another incredible haul!"

She greeted a slender woman in a bunny-girl outfit who had dragged a cart behind her into the building.

"It's not like that...at all, okay?" Erza muttered sadly to herself after being lectured and left behind.



I was home. As much as you could call our 87-year-old apartment in a desolate part of Cyclo “home,” anyway.

I put a hand on the door and stopped. There was a presence on the other side. No, that wasn’t exactly true. I wasn’t strong enough to “sense” people, after all. These cheapo apartments were just so shoddy that you could hear people walking inside the rooms.

Someone was inside. Emily, naturally. That was normal. Totally normal, right? But...what was I to do?

Thinking back, it had been decades since I’d last gone home to a place where someone else was waiting.

What do I do? Just say “I’m home,” maybe? Rgh... Urk... Argh! There’s no point in thinking about it! I’m going in.

“I-I’m fome—” I opened the door...and immediately fumbled my words like a loser. What a blunder. That went so bad that it could’ve brought a hundred-year-long love story to an end instantly.

“Welcome home!” Emily greeted me with a smile.

“I-I’m...home.”

I might’ve stumbled, but I managed to say it.

“Right. Welcome home.”

“What’d you do all— Whoa! The place is spotless.”

“Yep!” Emily replied. “I spent the day cleaning.”

“Cleaning doesn’t even begin to describe it.”

Understatement of the year, right there.

The walls were pure white. The floors were sparkling clean. Before, it had been so bad that you could expect to see cockroach hell first thing in the morning, but now it was as clean as a whole new building. This wasn't just cleaning...it was a total reformation!

"Did I do something wrong? It was my first time cleaning an apartment, so I went all-out..." Emily mumbled as she slumped over.

"Nah. In fact, it's incredible."

She perked up right away and replied, "Really?!"

Still, I was astounded. I went inside and checked the corners and tight spots. I traced a finger against the frame of our one window—and it slid across just fine! Even the most judgmental mother-in-law wouldn't have been able to find a problem here.

It was incredible. Truly incredible. No other word described it.

"Here you go, Yoda. Have a towel," Emily said, offering me a hot towel.

"A towel?" I said as I accepted it and wiped my hands and face. It felt wonderfully refreshing. "That hits the spot. Thanks, Emily."

"Thanks for working all day. I've made tea. Would you like some?"

"You've got tea, too?!"

I was amazed. Was this what it meant to leave nothing to be desired?

Thanks to Emily, my entire time at home was lovely. Meanwhile, she remained hard at work.

"Emily, how about you take a break?" I pleaded. "You must be tired, and you've certainly done enough."

But she refused, saying, “Being able to do things around my home is new and exciting. I’m not tired at all!”

“If you say so... Knock yourself out, I guess.”

Emily’s self-assessment seemed accurate; the smile never left her face throughout her chores.

Hey, if she enjoys this stuff, then I might as well leave her to it.

“By the way, I hear a new dungeon appeared,” I said. “Nihonium, or something?”

“I’ve heard of that, too. But they say it’s a useless dungeon.”

“Useless?”

“A bunch of people went to investigate it, but apparently, nothing dropped from the monsters at all,” Emily explained. “They got helpers from other cities, so lots of people with A level drops went, but nobody got a single thing from it.”

“Wow. Does that happen often?”

“It does. One dungeon known as Chrome, for example, has no drops, but the water there is delicious enough that people can make a living selling it, so some people say that the water counts as a drop.”

“Interesting...”

Nihonium, eh? A dungeon without drops.

My curiosity had been piqued.



The next day, Emily went to B1 of Tellurium as usual, while I left for Nihonium.

Dungeons dropped *literally* everything in this world. Some dropped only alcoholic beverages like beer, wine, or shochu liquor. I'd also heard of a dungeon that only dropped marbled meat, of all things, leading to it being monopolized by a group of rowdy dudes.

In a world where everything came from dungeons, the one that piqued my interest the most was the place that supposedly dropped nothing.

I arrived and went inside. Unlike Tellurium, this one was more like a natural limestone cavern. Nobody was inside. There wasn't even a status board to check my stats. They probably hadn't bothered to set one up, since they couldn't get any drops.

Despite being brand-new, this dungeon had been abandoned. That was apparent proof of its uselessness.

Well, whatever...

I really was just going to take a look. If a guy with S drops like me couldn't get anything, then I'd return to Tellurium and meet up with Emily.

Now, what sort of monsters will we find here?

After a short while spent wandering around the dungeon, I spotted a monster. It was in the shape of a human, but was made of nothing but bones that were barely covered by tattered clothing. I assumed it was called a skeleton.

The skeleton attacked me, so I fixed my aim and pierced it with my bamboo spear. The spear made it through its clothes, but hit no bones.

I quickly yanked out the spear, rushed to evade, and then stabbed into its

head from the side. The spear, with all of my strength behind it, pierced its skull. Next, I threw in a kick and stabbed wildly. With many of its bones broken now, the skeleton tottered, fell to its knees, and finally collapsed. From there, it stopped moving and disappeared.

Phew! Now, how about that drop...? Oh?

Something that resembled a seed landed where the skeleton had been. Was it a drop?

I picked up the seed—except, as soon as I touched it, it melted away. It was gone, like that video where the raccoon tried to put cotton candy in water.

What happened? What did it mean?

While I wondered what was going on, I heard a mysterious voice.

Ryota's max HP went up by 1!

04. A Bright, Warm Home

On B1 of the dungeon Nihonium—the very same place where people with high drop stats had declared there were no drops—I mindlessly went on farming skeletons. Each dead skeleton heralded a seed, and when I picked them up, they melted like snowflakes in my hand. Each time, I heard that same voice:

Ryota's max HP went up by 1!

I knew intuitively that these monsters were dropping stat-boosting items, so I hunted them ceaselessly. By the time I'd killed a hundred—meaning my HP had gone up a hundred times—I decided that was a good stopping point. I wanted to know whether my stats were really rising, and by how much.

But what was the best way to check? As this was a useless dungeon, a trip around the first floor revealed that there were no status boards to be found.

Unfortunately, I would have to return to Tellurium and use the free board there. With that in mind, I moved to leave. But when I started walking, a person appeared from around the corner: a small girl hauling an enormous hammer. It was my roommate, Emily.

“Oh, you're still here, Yoda? Thank goodness.”

“What brings you all the way here, Emily?”

“It's late, so I came to check on you.”

“Wait, it's late?”

“Yes, it’s nighttime,” Emily confirmed.

Nighttime already, huh? I hadn’t realized.

“Though my internal clock *does* know exactly when the last train departs...” I mused to myself.

“Last train?” Emily asked.

“Oh, nothing. You wouldn’t get it.”

“Will you be staying here, Yoda? If so, I should probably head home first.”

“Head home first? Why?”

“I can make you a meal and bring it over,” she replied.

“I would love a meal, but I’d better call it a day for now,” I decided. “Let’s go home together.”

“Okay!”

When she heard my reply, Emily beamed the biggest, happiest smile.



Together, we headed toward the dungeon’s exit. I had gone pretty far into B1, so it took us quite some time to leave.

Along the way, we encountered another skeleton. It emerged from the ground as if crawling out of its own grave.

“Whoa!” Emily exclaimed. “That’s the kind of monster that appears in this dungeon?”

“Yeah. I bet you can make quick work of it, Emily.”

“Ah! You may be right,” she agreed. Fire burned in her eyes.

The skeletons moved even slower than slimes. Their bones clacked as they sluggishly approached. They were about as slow as an old person, but when they got close enough, they’d suddenly lunge at you. You couldn’t let your guard down with them.

But most of the time, yes, they were slow—slower even than our slow-but-strong Emily. She had the power advantage, too, so she could crush this skeleton before it attacked.

“Wanna try it?” I asked.

“I sure do,” Emily replied as she raised her hammer.

When fighting the bouncing slimes, she had to let them hit her once before retaliating, but that wouldn’t be necessary here.

Emily made the first move, raised her hammer, and swung it straight down.

Pow!

The sound of bones being crushed was drowned out by the sound of the hammer hitting the dirt. She soon lifted her weapon, revealing that the skeleton had turned to dust beneath it.

“I did it!”

“See? I told you it’d be easy.”

“Yep! But unfortunately, I’ve heard that they don’t drop anything...”

She was excited at first by the ease of her victory, but the lack of a drop disappointed her just as much. I bet she was hoping to make money here.

“Guess it won’t drop for you, huh?” I mused.

“I’ve heard that they don’t drop anything for anyone,” Emily replied as she cocked her head in confusion.

Another skeleton appeared, so rather than bothering to explain, I readied my spear and lunged. Now that I’d slain a hundred, I knew their movement patterns well. Thus, I efficiently knocked its skull off and crushed it to bits. My efforts were rewarded with the usual seed.

“When I kill them, I get that.”

“Whaaat?!”

“Y’know what? Emily, you take this one.”

“Yes, sir— Oh?”

Emily tried to pick up the fallen seed several times, but she grabbed nothing but air.

“I can’t. It keeps slipping out of my hand.”

She looked at me, confused, so I gave it a try and was able to pick it up just fine.

“Are you able to pick it up normally, Yoda?”

“Seems like it. Have you ever seen anything like this?”

“No. Drops should be normal objects that anyone can pick up. Otherwise, we wouldn’t be able to sell them.”

“That does make sense.”

“Oh!” Emily gasped. “It disappeared.”

Ryota’s max HP went up by 1!

“Do you know of any items that raise stats?” I asked.

“What do you mean?”

“When I pick these up, I hear a voice that says, ‘Ryota’s max HP went up by 1.’”

“I’ve never heard of anything like that.”

“Never?”

“Never, ever,” she insisted. “If that existed, it would be extremely expensive. Rich people and princes would be the strongest people in the world.”

Sounds about right.

That thought had occurred to me in games I played long ago. Hell, I’d done it myself sometimes. It was fun to pour stat-raising items into my weakest characters to make them strong, after all.

I’d always thought that if stat boosters were real, the rich would be the strongest people in the world. I was certain that if they really existed, they would totally destroy the world’s balance. They would be sold for exorbitant sums. Some would use them and others would sell them. They would be the big-ticket item everyone wanted. The fact that they weren’t known this way in this world was clear evidence that they didn’t exist. And yet, I had held them in my hands. Did that mean...that only I could make them drop? And that only I could use them?

Before getting too excited, I declared, “Let’s make sure they actually raised my stats.”

“We need to leave to do that. There’s a place near the cave’s entrance where

we can check.”

“Wait, really?”

“I believe it was used by the expedition teams,” Emily explained. “It probably won’t be there much longer.”

“I see.”

Thus, we left the dungeon. The trip out was smooth. In fact, we didn’t run into a single skeleton on the way.

Outside, it was indeed nighttime. We approached a rather hard-to-notice status board near the dungeon entrance and I put my hand on it.



“Whaaat?!” Emily shouted. “Your level’s the same, but your HP has gone up!”

“It worked after all.”

“Is this the effect of that seed from before?”

“Yep. I got this far by consuming 101 of them.”

“Incredible! I’ve never heard of anyone getting stronger without leveling up!”

Emily exclaimed as she hopped up and down, gazing at me with sparkles in her eyes.



The next morning, I woke up earlier than usual. Since Emily had come to get me the night before, I'd gotten home at a normal time and gone to sleep at a normal time. I woke up nice and refreshed as a result. That was also thanks in part to this room, of course.

When I'd first rented it out, it had smelled musty and was extremely drafty. I had decided to simply accept it as livable back then due to budgetary concerns. But now, it was a bright and happy home. I loved it. Not only did it soothe my fatigue, but it also filled my heart with joy the moment I woke up.

I looked out the window and saw a bird sitting atop the windowpane, staring at me. It was as if it wanted to come inside.

Evidently, Emily's home could charm even the birds outside. How incredible.

"Good morning, Yoda," Emily greeted me. "I made breakfast."

"Thanks. Whoa, an omelet?"

"Yep."

"I'll dig right in. Wow, it's delicious!"

The omelet she made for me was soft on the outside and gooey on the inside. The rich taste of eggs burst into my mouth as I dug in, piling bliss upon bliss.

"Thank you! The meal was wonderful!"

“Will you be going back to Nihonium today, Yoda?”

“That’s the plan.”

If I could raise my stats at will, then I wanted to raise them until they hit their limits. There were more floors, too, so once I was full on HP, I definitely wanted to see if I could raise another stat on the next floor. As such, my intention for today was to spend more time in Nihonium.

However, as I considered my plan, I noticed Emily looking at me worriedly.

“Why the long face?” I asked her.

“Don’t push yourself, please.”

“Push myself?”

“You do that, Yoda,” she insisted. “When you rented this place...you looked terribly tired.”

Yeah, that did happen. But I’m used to it, so—

She interrupted my mental protest by saying, “The dungeon won’t disappear, so make sure you’re home tonight... I would be happier if you were...”

“Huh? What was that last part?”

“N-Nothing! Anyway, I would prefer it if you didn’t do anything crazy.”

“Nothing crazy, huh?”

Leaving work on time? Hah! Someone clearly lacks experience working in the real world. Whoops. There I go remembering the bad again.

I didn’t want to think about those days, so I shook my head in an attempt to rid myself of the bad thoughts.

“Yoda?” Emily called with a worried look on her face.

“I get it,” I said. “I’ll be back before nightfall.”

“Oh... Okay!”

“Anyway, I’m off.”

“See you later!”

Emily saw me off as I left. For the first time, I swore that I would come home early.



I had told Emily I wouldn’t be late, but I never claimed that I wouldn’t push myself while I worked. Now back on B1 of Nihonium, I mowed down skeletons at an incredible rate.

Since I’d promised to be home before nightfall, the clear solution was to go all-out until then.

Spot skeleton, instakill.

Pick up the seed, keep running.

Repeat.

I gradually grew used to the skeletons’ movements and spawn points, making my work even more efficient. Thus, I raised my max HP from C to S before sundown.

When I got home on time as promised, Emily greeted me with overt joy and open arms.

05. Incredible. Strange.

I awoke from a deep slumber. When I looked up, I saw an unfamiliar ceiling—a lifeless stone ceiling. Was I in some sort of underground passage...?

Oh, right! I came to B2 of Tellurium. Huh? Why am I sleeping here, anyway?

Suddenly, I felt something slapping me, so I sat up and looked to the side.

Oof!

Something collided with me and quickly jumped away. I looked over again and realized it was a slime. Or more specifically, a sleep slime, one of many such monsters inhabiting this floor.

Did he put me to sleep?!

I recalled that I was in battle and rushed to stand up. Then, I picked up the fallen bamboo spear next to me.

How long did I sleep? Oh, crap, was it beating me up while I slept? Geez, that's no good. I'm glad I didn't die.

The sleep slime bounced toward me, so I responded with a spear thrust. My ferocious stab only grazed its body, however.

Shit!

The slime changed directions, bounced, and flew my way again. It scored a perfect hit on my exposed flank!

Wait, that doesn't hurt...

“Oh, I see.”

My consciousness faded...and I once again fell asleep.



Again, I awoke from a deep slumber, but this time, I jumped right up. The sleep slime was body-slamming me over and over in the same place as before. I readied my spear, aimed more carefully this time, and skewered the incoming slime.

“Phew,” I sighed, wiping the sweat from my brow. That was one hell of a fight.

I had encountered monsters the moment I stepped foot on B2 of Tellurium. Then, I was put to sleep twice in a row and had been beaten to a pulp while I snoozed.

Being utterly destroyed in your sleep wasn’t a rare occurrence in video games, *especially* if you fell asleep twice! I felt baptized by this new floor. Emily’s reluctance to come down here was certainly understandable.

Meanwhile, the slime dropped a carrot—a well-formed, reasonably large carrot. As I picked it up and tossed it into a bag, I had to wonder how much it would sell for.

I walked onward in search of more sleep slimes. The first one had put me to sleep and beaten me up, but it didn’t seem to affect me much. That was probably—definitely, rather—thanks to me raising my HP to S on B1 of Nihonium.

If my HP was at maximum, the weak monsters on the upper floors wouldn’t do much damage even if they were free to attack me. That was just how HP worked in this world. And so, I boldly went in search of more slimes.

Lo and behold, another sleep slime appeared. I prepped my bamboo spear. When the slime leaped in, I dodged right out of the way.

This time, I was serious. I would probably wake up before dying if I was put to sleep, but I was here in Tellurium to farm drops to sell, so sleeping through every fight was far too inefficient.

Evade, pound.

Evade, thrust.

It'd put me to sleep if it hit me, so I fought prudently. The fight dragged on. Three minutes passed, and I still hadn't felled it.

Eventually, something came flying in from the side. The red object struck the slime directly and made it burst into flames. It burned, melted, disappeared, and became a carrot. The carrot was a fair bit smaller than the ones I'd gotten.

Wait, what the hell?!

I whipped around and spotted four people: three men and one woman.

A party, I assume?

"Aww, too bad. You snooze, you lose!"

"If a sleep slime's got you on the ropes, you might as well go back upstairs, pal."

"Easy Scan... He's level 1. Allow me to warn you that this floor is extremely dangerous for a level 1."

Once they'd spat enough venom my way, the party ignored the carrot that had dropped and proceeded. There was a staircase up ahead, which they used to head down to the next floor.

What was their deal? I was a little miffed, but I knew that getting mad would

solve nothing, so I decided to get back to work. Or...so I'd thought.

"Whoa! Wh-What's up?"

The person who had appeared before me—and scared the hell out of me—was the lone female of the four.

"..."

She remained silent.

"Aren't you going with your friends?"

The girl was a little over five feet tall and wore a bunny-girl outfit. She looked at me with cold eyes.

I guess she's one of those asocial types... Wait a second.

"Were you...born with those ears?" I inquired.

When I first saw her, I'd thought that she was in a bunny-girl outfit, but upon closer inspection, I realized her ears weren't part of a hairband; they were real ears growing from her head. It seemed that she was a natural-born bunny-girl.

As I wondered what her story was, she spoke up and said, "Level 1?"

"Huh? Oh, me? Yeah, I'm level 1. Got a problem with that?"

"I hate low levels," she said and karate-chopped my head. Her hand then whistled through the air and struck me with what *would* have been a satisfying smack if I hadn't been on the business end of it. It didn't hurt, which confused me further.

What's the deal with that chop?

"Huh...?"

For some reason, she looked just as confused. She cocked her head with a

strange look on her face.

“Wh-What?”

“...”

She left without saying anything!

The girl simply whirled around and walked off.

Uh, wh-what was that all about?

I was utterly bewildered by what had just happened, but it didn't seem like those four were coming back, so I returned to farming sleep slimes.



I left the dungeon on time again so that I wouldn't leave Emily alone. On the way home, I stopped at Swallow's Returned Favor to sell the carrots I'd earned.



As usual, Erza handled the transaction.

“Where did you hunt these?” she asked me.

“Where? Uh, I got them from the sleep slimes on B2 of Tellurium.”

“Whaaat?! Does that floor drop carrots like these?”

“What does ‘like these’ mean?” I asked as I cocked an eyebrow. “Is something wrong with them?”

“No, they’re incredible,” Erza replied. “They don’t smell like carrots and they’re much sweeter. Why, they’re so good that I’d bet they could be eaten raw without dressing.”

“Wow. Do high drop rates increase quality, too?”

“Oh! You *do* have a high plant drop rate, don’t you, Ryota?”

“Sort of. How high would you guess?”

“With carrots like *these*? I’d say B or A—A is the highest in the world, you know?”

“Is it?” I pressed.

“That it is. Stats can range from A to F, with A being the highest.”

Hmm...

That matched up with what Emily had told me: stats went from A to F, and A was the highest. I had doubted Emily a little given her airheadedness, but Erza seemed like a normal girl. Besides, if she was an employee at a place like this, I was sure I could trust her.

My S drop rates aren’t natural, huh? I wonder why?

As the question crossed my mind, Erza paid me for the carrots I’d brought in.

A large number of high-quality carrots earned me 8,000 piro in one day. Thirty days of that, and my monthly salary would be 240,000 piro. If piro was about equal to yen, that was a fair bit higher than my previous salary.

I liked that.



I returned to our warm home. The moment I opened the door and stepped inside, a sense of bliss enveloped me.

“Welcome home, Yoda. Umm, why are you gawking all around the room?” Emily asked curiously after greeting me.

“It’s kind of strange, really,” I mused. “Look at all the little things and there’s nothing special about them, but when I see the big picture, this place feels so warm and welcoming.”

“Do you think so?”

“It’s clean and all, but that’s not really the whole of it. Hmm...”

“I see. Anyway, welcome home.”

“Yeah, thank you.”

“Have some tea,” she offered.

“Thanks... Oh, how refreshing.”

Emily’s tea was perfectly chilled. Not to the point of being ice-cold, but not lukewarm, either. It was just the right level of cool to permeate my fatigued body. She was truly incredible.

I handed her some carrots, as I'd kept enough for the two of us to eat together. In Emily's hands, they would be ingredients for a wonderful dinner.

I was excited. What sort of meal would she make as we were embraced by the bliss of this room?

Knock, knock...

"Yes? Who's there?" Emily asked.

"I'll go get it."

"Okay."

Since Emily was in the middle of cooking, I answered the door. When I opened it, I saw a familiar face.

"You're...that girl from before," I said in lieu of a greeting.

It was the bunny-girl I had encountered in the dungeon. As soon as she saw me, she karate-chopped my head.

Slap!

It didn't hurt, but it was just a tad too sudden.

"What's your problem?" I demanded.

"I hate low levels."

"Then don't come to my home."

"..."

The bunny-girl stared at me. Her emotionless eyes made it difficult to discern what she was thinking.

"Um..." I stammered.

"..."

For the second time, she left without a word. What was her deal?

“Yoda, who was it?” Emily asked.

“That’s what I’d like to know.”

“Huh? Oh, they’re back.”

“What?”

I whipped around to face the door again. The bunny-girl had returned with a man in tow. He was one of the four people from earlier, too. I remembered him as the one most like a thug, with the dirtiest mouth.

“Ow, damn, what? Cut it out!” he screamed at the bunny-girl.

“This will end fast,” she said ominously. “It won’t hurt.”

“Won’t hurt—NO, don’t! I thought we were pals?!”

The bunny-girl stood the man up straight and chopped him good.

Slap! Pssshew!

Blood spurted from his head like water from a whale’s spout.

“Eek!” Emily shrieked. Couldn’t exactly blame her there.

The bunny-girl promptly forgot about her friend (they were friends, right?) and stared at me.

“I hate low levels,” she repeated.

“O-Okay?”

Slap!

She chopped me, but it didn’t hurt much.

“But you’re at such a low level. Why?”

“Why what...?”

She must be confused over me being level 1 and having 5 HP.

“Strange,” the bunny-girl mused. “That chop should be strong enough to destroy this entire building.”

“You used something like that against me?!”

“Incredible. Strange.”

The bunny-girl cocked her head, matching the total confusion suggested by her deadpan words.

06. Bunnies, Carrots, and Strength Seeds

“Umm, so why are you here, exactly?” I asked, totally clueless.

“Here,” the bunny-girl said as she pulled out a carrot and shoved it toward me.

“A carrot? Why, though?”

“That’s one of your carrots, Yoda,” Emily commented from behind me.

My carrots?

I looked at the carrot again. Now that she mentioned it, it *did* look like the carrots I had obtained from Tellurium and sold to Erza. Not that I could prove it, of course.

“Is it?”

“The smell and color are the same. It’s definitely a Yoda-brand carrot.”

“Yoda-brand carrots...” the bunny-girl muttered to herself.

“You make it sound like a special breed.”

“Those do exist, you know,” Emily said.

“What does?”

“There are certain artisans who hunt specific monsters all the time. If they can get drops that other people can’t, they put their names on that stuff to create a brand.”

Oh, I get that. Lots of things come with the manufacturer’s name on them.

I understood that much, but... I looked at the bunny-girl again. What did it matter if this was one of the carrots I'd brought from the dungeon?

"I wuv carrots."

"Wuv?"

"Bunnies wuv carrots."

She nodded vigorously and stared at me with total sincerity. Now I knew for certain: the ears that seemed to sprout out of this bunny-girl's head...were real rabbit ears. They had bobbed adorably when she said she "wuvved" carrots.

Her eyes had the sparkle of a child who'd just gotten a new toy. The rabbit ears had moved at the same time. The girl with the bunny-girl outfit was a real rabbit! Truly, this world was a mysterious one.



In our apartment, the bunny-girl—who introduced herself as Eve—stood next to Emily and stared as she cooked.

"First, you have to peel the skin off the carrot," Emily instructed. "Then, you slice it into thin strips."

"Noodles...?" her new friend asked.

"Yep. I've made it into carrot noodles. Boil them for ten seconds, then fry them just right so that they stay nice and crunchy."

"Oooh..."

"Next, we chop the carrot leaf and cook it with meat to thicken the broth with

starch.”

“Thick broth...?”

“Add in the carrot noodles we made and...there! We’ve got tricolor carrot-noodle soup!”

“Oooh!”

The bunny-girl’s eyes gleamed in excitement, so much so that her irises almost seemed to be in the shape of stars. I understood her feelings. Emily’s handiwork was like real magic, after all.

Dinner was ready in the blink of an eye, and the three of us sat down to eat. I was a little worried about the carrot noodles at first, but my concerns were blown away by my very first bite. They didn’t have the smell of carrots that I’d braced myself for, so all that remained was perfect sweetness.

The crunchiness of these noodles was reminiscent of very hard “barikata” somen noodles. The thick broth also matched the noodles perfectly well, likely thanks to the incorporation of the carrot leaf. The gentle flavor spread from my tongue to my entire body.

I felt pure bliss. Joy filled my heart.

“This is great!” I announced.

“I’m so glad it suits your palate.”

“It’s not just that,” I continued. “This is delicious. Like, seriously delicious! You could sell this stuff.”

“980 piro per plate,” Eve added.

“That’s a fair price! Hell, I’d pay more for it.”

Eve and I lavished praise on Emily’s cooking and finished our dishes with

incredible speed. Our excessive compliments caused Emily to turn shy and stop eating.

The bunny-girl stared greedily at Emily's remaining food.

"Shlrp..."

"Oh? Do you want this, too?" Emily asked as she offered her leftovers to Eve.

"Yesh!" the bunny-girl exclaimed before she began shoveling it down excitedly.

"Are you sure about this?" I asked our chef.

"Absolutely! I'm more than happy to see someone enjoying my food."

"I see."

I watched Eve chow down. Our encounter in the dungeon, her visiting out of nowhere... I'd thought she was a weirdo, but she was cute, too.

Noticing my gaze, she blushed and said, "I hate low levels."

"You really don't have to bother chopping me as if it's obligatory."

Eve frowned at my words, but she still downed Emily's cooking. Once she was done, she put her hands together and thanked our chef for the meal.



The next day, I went back to Nihonium. Since my HP was at S now, I felt I had graduated from B1. With hope in my heart, I made my way downward.

A short walk later, I encountered a monster. The monsters on this floor were zombies. Like skeletons, they wore tattered clothes. The rotting parts of their

bodies here and there were very zombie-chic, indeed.

“Zombies, huh? Just what the reports said.”

As Nihonium had already been inspected by others, its statistics were readily available. Information useful to the producers known as adventurers, such as drops, monster names, and monster characteristics, was made public. And in this case, it was accurate; I had encountered a corpse monster known as a zombie.

So far so good, right?

But as I confronted the monster, I felt eyes digging into me.

“Hmm...”

Someone was staring at me very intently from their hiding place. I turned around. The perp was hidden, but their ears were sticking out. Rabbit ears that were bouncing up and down...

Yep, that's Eve.

“Hey, what're you doing there?” I called out.

“...”

She didn't respond, but I could still see her ears. I had to wonder if she seriously thought she was hiding well.

Meanwhile, the zombie attacked.

“Uooorgh,” it groaned as it swung a rotting arm down at me. Since I was distracted, I wasn't able to dodge in time. Instead, I blocked it with my trusty bamboo spear.

Crack!

Emily's gift to me had been broken in two.

"Crap, my weapon—"

"Hah!"

As I started to think of how to respond, Eve appeared before me. She'd been hiding way behind me before, but she leaped in front of me in the blink of an eye. Now positioned between me and the zombie, she unleashed a powerful karate chop.

The zombie was shattered into tiny pieces.

"How did your chop do that?! That zombie doesn't even have bones!" I protested. Eve's perfectly vertical chop hadn't cut the zombie in two or even mutilated it—she had *shattered* it. "What did you do just now?"

"I chopped a hundred times in one second," she explained matter-of-factly.

"You minced him?!"

"I did it to you, too, Carrotman."

"You hit me a hundred times?!"

"More accurately, a hundred and one."

"That's really precise! Why the extra chop?!" I rebutted wildly. However, Eve simply stared at me, her face solemn.

"You shouldn't be here," she said.

"Huh? Wh-Why...?"

"Carrots don't drop here."

"That's what matters to you?!"

And here I thought I'd missed some vital knowledge about B2 of Nihonium,

but no. Eve's mind was filled with nothing but carrots.

"So, you're telling me to leave and go back to Tellurium?" I asked.

"Carrotman belongs in Carrotland."

"You talk weird."

"Rabbit want carrot."

"Then go buy one!"

"But I want your carrot," she pleaded, looking up at me seductively.

My heart throbbed. The adorableness of the act, added to the innuendo of her words, had caused me to think impure thoughts. You could say something else was throbbing, too. I didn't want her to notice—especially not the latter development. But mostly, I just wanted to get out of this situation.

"S-Sure," I finally said. "I'll go later."

"Later?"

"Later."

"...Okay."

Eve reluctantly assented, turned around, and left. Or so I thought, until she stopped in place and then came back to me.

"What's the matter? Need something—Ow!"

She chopped me right on the forehead.

"I hate low levels," she complained for the nth time.

"You didn't have to come back just for that!"

"I *really* hate them."

“Is my existence that offensive?!”

But, apparently satisfied by chopping me, Eve had already left.

I looked at my broken bamboo spear. My weapon may have been gone, but I wanted to somehow kill a zombie before leaving. Since my HP was S, I knew I could probably manage. The skeletons on the first floor had dropped HP-boosting seeds, so I wanted to see what the zombies would do.

I walked around the dungeon, and a minute later, I encountered another zombie. Then, I braced myself and faced the monster. We would settle this the old-fashioned way: a bare-knuckle brawl.

The zombie hit me a bunch of times, but surprisingly, it didn’t hurt. Deciding that I was fine, I kept on pummeling without dodging.

I...really needed a weapon. Brawling like this came with a lot of danger, so I would have preferred a long-range weapon. As the fight raged on at a snail’s pace, I reminisced over old memories. In video games, I had often played a gunman or a mage.

After countless solid strikes, the zombie fell and disappeared—and it dropped a seed! It was the same shape as those dropped by the skeletons up above, but this one was a different color. When I picked it up, I heard that mysterious voice again.

Ryota’s strength went up by 1!

I heard a familiar rabbit’s voice, too, yelling, “Whaaat?!”

You still haven’t left?

07. Sudden Fame

By picking up the seed, I had increased my strength by 1. Then, I turned toward Eve. She was leaning forward as far as possible, her bunny ears bobbing up and down.

The bunny-girl stared at me, apparently forgetting that she was supposed to be hidden. What had gotten into her? After we locked eyes for a moment, she panicked and hid again.

“It’s too late. I can still see your ears.”

“Ah...!”

Her rabbit ears perked up and froze in place.

Did you really think they were hidden?

Eve resigned herself, peeked around the corner, and finally walked over to me. She stood in front of me and glared bitterly before unleashing a rather slow chop.

Slap!

That one hurt more than before.

Is it just me, or does it seem like she’s trying to hide the fact that she’s pouting?

“What was that?” she demanded.

“What?”

“That drop.”

“...Oh.”

Come to think of it, how do I explain this?

Given the situation and all of the information I had, I was almost certain that I was the only person in this world with drop rates of S, so it was hard to tell whether I should share that information.

In my experience, nobody trusts you when you say you or someone else is special, so I'd avoided doing so up to now. They were like magic words if you used them in just the right situation at work, but they could also make you seem like a scammer. If your opponent figured out your game, then your job would just become a hundred times harder.

I didn't want to claim that I was special, even if it was true, so...what to do, then?

Hmm... Eve's really staring at me.

Stare.

Staaare.

Staaaaaare.

“Staaare.”

“You didn't have to say it!”

“...”

She staaared at me again. I knew how this worked. If I didn't say anything, it would never end.

Fine, then. I'll just—

“No carrots yet?” she finally asked.

“That’s it?! What happened to the conversation from before?!”

“If I can’t have carrots...”

“Th-Then?” I gulped. Was I in danger?

“My eyes will turn red.”

“Now you sound more like a rabbit!”

“See?” Eve asked, showing me her eyes.

“They’re just bloodshot because you’ve opened them wide!”

“This is a dead-or-carrot situation.”

“Is your life on the line?!”

Haaah...

Playing the straight man with her was more exhausting than fist-fighting the zombie. Not that it mattered, really. I was just glad that she had forgotten about the seed drop. But still, I was tired.

“You can have your carrots later,” I answered. “I’m planning to go to Tellurium in the early afternoon, so just wait a little longer.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“Okay.”

Surprisingly satisfied by my answer, Eve turned and left. I thought she’d try and fail at hiding again, but no, she had actually left.

So wait, all she needed...was carrots?



Throughout the morning, I raised my strength from F to D on B2 of Nihonium. In the afternoon, I headed to the corresponding floor of Tellurium to farm carrots.

Thanks to my higher strength, I was defeating sleep slimes much more easily. As such, the grind was far more efficient than yesterday's, despite my missing weapon.

One problem arose as a result, however. At around 4 PM—too early to get off work, but too late to take a full trip to town and back—the carrots I'd gathered had become too heavy to carry.



When I arrived at Swallow's Returned Favor, Eve was already there waiting. The place was packed full of customers ready to sell, but she stood out as she sat all alone. It was as if this bunnysuited, bunny-eared girl had carved out a place of her own. Nobody dared penetrate her bubble.

I had to wonder why. Stranger still, as I approached with carrots in tow, people started to clamor.

"Who's that guy?"

"I dunno. Some nameless newbie, I'd guess."

"Ignorance is scary. Everybody knows not to approach the Killer Rabbit!"

What are they talking about?

Confused, I addressed Eve, saying, “Brought your carrots.”

I handed her a carrot, which prompted the onlookers to pipe up again.

“No way! He gave her a carrot?”

“Does he know what he’s just done?”

“Poor guy. His head’s about to get split like a pomegranate.”

The clamor was louder this time.

Seriously, what?

Suddenly, Eve hit me with a karate chop.

“What was that for? I gave you a carrot.”

“I hate low levels.”

“This again? Well, that’s too bad.”

My level would never go up. No, wait—I had found seeds that raised my HP and strength, so I wouldn’t be surprised to find something on Nihonium’s lower floors that would raise my level, too. Anyway, that was a question for the future. Lucky me if it did exist; no problem if not.

While I thought about the matter, Eve bit into the carrot. She held it with both hands and nibbled away. The way she ate was very reminiscent of other rodents like hamsters or squirrels. If I had my phone, I’d have snapped a pic—no, taken a video—and twitted about it.

“How is it?” I asked.

“I wuv carrots.”

“Noted.”

I’m glad, but...

“Wh-What?!”

“Eve, of all people...”

“The carrot junkie has accepted his carrot?!”

The clamor continued, but it was different from before. Earlier, our onlookers had sounded exasperated, and perhaps a little sympathetic. This time, their voices were tinged with surprise.

Seriously though, what?

I had no idea what was going on, but I decided to ignore it and headed to the counter to sell my remaining carrots. Erza’s counter had just opened up, so naturally, I went there.

“Hi there. Got another haul for you today.”

“R-Ryota, what was that?” she stammered.

“What was what?”

“Are you friends with her?”

“Her?” I asked. Following Erza’s line of sight, I saw Eve at the end of it, still nibbling away at her carrot. “You mean Eve? We’re not quite friends. It’s more like she just follows me around.”

“She follows you?!”

“Sorry, that was a dumb way of putting it. See, I fed her a carrot and she took a liking to me.”

That didn’t seem like the best wording either, but when I thought of how adorably she gnawed at those carrots, I figured it sounded more apt.

I fed her a carrot, and she took a liking to me. Yep, accurate.

I thought I'd said the right thing, but people piped up all around us. Erza looked at me in utter disbelief as well.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"W-Wait just a moment," Erza said as she ran to the back in a tizzy. As I waited for her to return, the people around me kept on talking.

Can anyone explain what all this is about?

Erza promptly returned, looking like she'd calmed down a little bit.

"Apologies for the wait. I've discussed things with my boss."

"Discussed what?"

"We would like to buy your carrots for double the price."

"Whaaat?! Double?! Why?!"

Things were only getting crazier.

"What do you think?" she urged.

"Well, sure! But... Oh!" I whipped around to look at Eve. She had finished her carrot and was gazing greedily at the rest of my drops from the day. "Because of her?"

Erza nodded vigorously.



Eve Callusleader was an adventurer-slash-farmer with a trademark bunny-girl outfit and natural bunny ears. Her ultimate technique, the karate chop Excalibur, looked cute at a glance, but one full second after being hit by it, the

receiver would take explosive damage. Legend had it that the force behind her chops could cleave mountains in twain. She was also known by the title of Carrot Sommelier.

Eve had conquered all seven of the floors across Cyclo's five dungeons where carrots could be dropped. The carrots from B19 of Bismuth were especially valuable for their rarity, as Eve was the only one who knew how to defeat the monsters in a way that made them drop their carrots.

Her catchphrase was "dead or carrot." Some unfortunate folk had died after giving her bad carrots.



"You've just dumped so much information on me that I can't keep up," I commented.

"What matters is that it's extremely rare for Eve to acknowledge a good carrot."

"Guess I'll have to thank her then, huh?"

I gazed at the 15,000 piro I had made selling carrots. It was all because of Eve that I'd nearly doubled yesterday's earnings.

"I'd rather have a carrot than thanks," Eve butted in.

"Whoa! Where'd you even come from?!"

"As you can see, I am between your legs."

"Are you a child?! Stand up and talk to me like a normal person."

“Carrot, please,” she demanded.

“Tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow?”

“I’m done for the day. I leave work on time now.”

I had promised Emily that I would come home on time, and I planned to keep that promise.

“You’re going home?” Eve frowned.

“Yep.”

“Aww...”

“Don’t try the bunny-rabbit eyes on me. I’m done working for the day,” I repeated.

“No matter what?”

“No matter what.”

“Stingy,” Eve groaned.

“Call me whatever you like.”

“I hate low levels,” she said as she chopped me.

“It has nothing to do with my level.”

“Hmph, I say.”

Eve poked out her lip and left. As she exited, the mood in the shop palpably relaxed.

Geez, how scared of her are you guys? Well, whatever.

I finally said goodbye to Erza. As usual, I left work on time and planned to buy

Emily a small gift on the way home.

“Tell me who produced these wonderful bean sprouts!”

A new uproar had begun brewing in the shop, so I slipped out to avoid getting caught up in it.

08. Nothing to Do With Taste

Another day, another trip to the dungeons. Like yesterday, I had spent the morning on B2 of Nihonium to raise my strength. Now that it was afternoon, I had come to Tellurium to farm my daily carrots. But once there, I caught sight of something horrifying.



A party of three wandered through B2 of Tellurium.

One was a rather well-built older man: energetic, with stern facial features. In contrast, the other two were younger—a man and woman, both in their early twenties. Their gear was tattered, proof of the fierce battles they had fought. Their hair and skin alike had lost their luster, marking them as people who had gone without sleep for days on end.

The three walked through the dungeon as a party until a monster—a sleep slime—appeared. With dull movements, the younger folk struck out to attack. They dealt damage together. Once the slime was weakened, the old man stepped out in front to deal the finishing blow.

As the sleep slime disappeared, it dropped a carrot. Their leader placed it in a cart-like device. He looked upon the spoils of war within the cart, a collection of vegetables dropped by monsters, with satisfaction.

Meanwhile, the younger folk were exhausted. So exhausted, in fact, that

black bags had formed under their eyes. This battle had only amplified their exhaustion. At this point, a stiff breeze would have been enough to topple them.

“On to the next one,” the old man declared.

“C-Captain... Let us rest just a little,” the younger man complained.

“We’re at our limit...” the woman added.

“What? Tired already, are you?”

“We’ve been in here for two whole days without proper rest.”

“Let us rest for just a little while...”

“You mustn’t be so feeble. Look at you, complaining after a mere two days of dungeoneering. Why, in my youth, we had to spend an entire week or two at a time in a dungeon like this!”

“But we haven’t even slept properly.”

“In a dungeon, you can never find the right time or place to sleep.”

“Then sleep standing,” the old man rebutted.

His comrades looked at him emotionlessly. The exhaustion had truly gotten to them. For an instant, displeasure was evident in his eyes.

But it truly did only last an instant. Immediately after, he clenched his fists and roared at the pair, “Do you think I’m forcing the two of you to work for no good reason?”

“Never!”

“We don’t think that at all.”

“I’m aware that I’m stern compared to others, but trust me when I say that

this is tough love. It is for your own good!”

“Our...”

“...own good...?”

The two young folk looked at each other.

“That’s right. I believe in your talents, young ones. Humans can only grow while they’re young; turn that around, and that means you must push yourself to grow as much as possible now. Don’t you agree?”

“That...”

“...may be true...”

“I want to see your dream with my own eyes.”

“Dream?” they both repeated.

“Indeed. The two of you can handle it. Right now, you may only be on B2 of Tellurium, but once you’ve grown, you will be able to conquer all of Cyclo’s five dungeons. You may one day be known as the Kings of Agriculture!”

“But...”

“We could never...”

“Furthermore!” the old man interrupted as they began to protest. “This is your success story in the making. You will inspire the youth of the future who also wish to explore dungeons. I wish to see the source of that! To spread your story throughout the world!”

“C-Captain!”

“Is this how you’ve always felt about us?”

The youth were moved. Their exhaustion was overridden by pride as they

gazed upon their leader.

“I believe in you. You two can do it. Now, will you believe in me?”

“Sir, yes, sir!”

As they both saluted him, motivation returned to their faces.



A three-person party with its leader browbeating his poor, exhausted comrades. What an awful thing to witness. I shuddered when I saw him prattling on about inspiration, growth, and dreams because it reminded me of my old self.

I had worked at a company just like that. The CEO had said things just like this old guy. My coworkers were just as moved to work because of it, too. What a crappy place. Simply remembering it put me in a bad mood.

“Yoda, is something the matter?” Emily asked as I slumped over sadly.

I turned to face her, but she wasn’t alone. Eve was there as well. As usual, Emily had slung an enormous hammer and her bag over her tiny body. Eve was also in her usual outfit, a bunnysuit that she paired with natural bunny ears.

Eve approached me wordlessly, reached out, and karatechopped me right in the forehead.

“I hate low levels,” she declared.

“I’m aware.”

“Less talk, more carrot.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

It seemed Eve had come here just because she wanted my carrot drops as soon as she could possibly get them. If she’d come to get them farm-fresh, then she clearly loved them.

She never wanted more than a few, so I figured I might as well get her share first. Turning, I said, “Let’s get to it, Emily.”

“Oh! I think you should take a little break first.”

“A break?”

Emily trotted over and looked up at my face. After staring me down for a moment, she finally declared, “We eat lunch first.”

“Lunch, huh?”

I was pretty hungry, to be sure. I’d spent the morning working my butt off in Nihonium, so I was plenty tired as well.

What about Eve, though? I wondered.

“Carrots,” the bunny repeated.

“Okay, I’ll get you one—”

“Eve, you must rest, too,” Emily demanded.

Looking rather annoyed, Eve poked out her lip as she replied, “I don’t need to rest.”

“Rest now, and you’ll get free carrot pudding.”

“Oooh!” Eve’s eyes sparkled as she screamed an all-too-familiar scream.

Carrot pudding... Pudding made from carrots, huh?

Emily prepared lunch with a big smile. She pulled things out from her bag,

including pudding that was as orange as any carrot.

That's Emily for you. You don't see orange pudding too often, but this still looks perfectly delicious.

And if I thought so, then there was no doubt that our carrot-loving friend would go wild.

"Carrot pudding! Hurray!"

"Yes, here you go. And Yoda, here's your lunchbox."

"Oh, thank you." I accepted it and sat atop the mat Emily had laid out.

When I opened the lunchbox, I saw that it had myriad colorful sides, and I smelled a wonderful fragrance. It was perfect in appearance, scent, and probably nutrition to boot. But that perfect balance was destroyed in an instant. With incredible speed, a small hand reached out from next to me and stole my carrots.

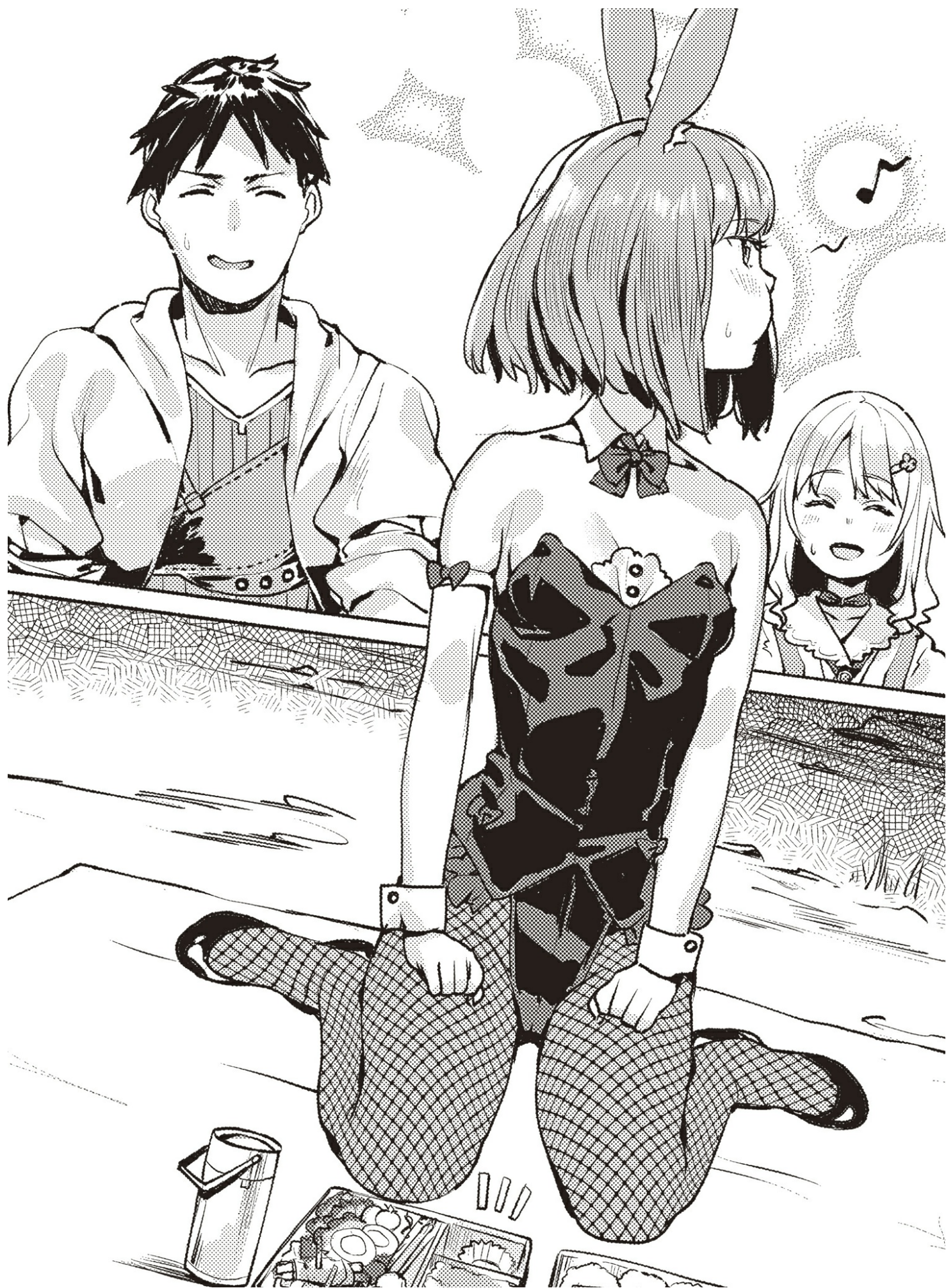
I looked sideways and found Eve gazing off in a different direction, chewing suspiciously.

She was whistling, too.

Come on. You're not even trying to hide it.

Not that I cared if she took my carrots. Best let her have them if she'd be the happiest with them, right?

I recovered, put my hands together, and said the usual, "Thanks for the food."



As soon as I took the first bite, I had to comment, “Whoa, this is good. This chicken katsu, or whatever, is incredible. It smells great, and the breading is deliciously sweet.”

“I used sweet potato powder for the breading,” Emily replied. “But the spice is a secret!”

“Sweet potato powder? So you dry it and make it into powder, huh? I had no idea that was a thing.”

Come to think of it, the breading was definitely starting to taste more and more like sweet potato. It harmonized perfectly with the juicy chicken. Their combined flavors filled my mouth with joy.

Getting to enjoy Emily’s home-cooked meals before work... I was truly a lucky man.

Just then, the three people from before passed by. The young man and woman looked even more exhausted as they glanced over covetously at our meal. Meanwhile, the old man seemed extremely displeased.

“Young ’uns, don’t be like them,” he grunted.

“Huh?” the man and woman gasped.

“Being so slovenly in a sacred dungeon is scandalous. Goods produced by such sloths can never truly shake the hearts of men.”

“O-Okay.”

“I guess...”

“Every drop has a soul. Our effort is reflected in the quality and taste of our products. Those who get to enjoy the fruits of our labor will be moved by it.”

He continued to lecture his underlings just as he had before. Honestly, I was

so fed up with listening to him that I got up to leave. But just as I did so, Eve ran off, then promptly returned. She had captured a sleep slime, a monster found on B2 of Tellurium. The bunny-girl carried the monster, a rather annoying one at that, like a plushie as it struggled in her arms. She must've been stronger than I thought.

Eve brought the slime to me and demanded, "Kill this."

"Huh?"

"Kill it."

"Oh, right, you want a carrot."

Eve must have wanted that carrot really badly if she was willing to go through the trouble of begging me to kill the slime for her.

"Hah!" the old man sneered.

I assume he was going on about how our methods weren't as good as his or something. Still, I ignored him and killed the sleep slime in Eve's arms. It was being held tightly in place, and I had raised my strength to C in Nihonium earlier, so it was easy to kill it in one blow.

Pop!

Out came a carrot, which Eve caught mid-air.

There's my first quota. Next—

I began to think. But instead of eating it, Eve took the carrot over to the party of three. They watched in confusion as she thrust it out toward them.

"Eat," she commanded.

"Huh?"

“Eat the carrot.”

“Er, but...”

The young man glanced at their leader, who was getting angrier by the second. Veins visibly bulged from his temple.

“Just eat it.”

Eve chopped the carrot clean in half and shoved the pieces into the young adventurers’ mouths. Unable to evade the sudden assault, they were force-fed carrots.

“Delicious!”

“Is this really a carrot?!”

Their eyes sparkled as they sang the carrot’s praises. It was just a raw carrot with the skin peeled off, but they began chewing away at it like it was manna from heaven.

“A carrot’s taste has nothing to do with your hardship,” Eve quietly declared. She might’ve been right about that, though the “carrot” part seemed unnecessary.

And yet, her preaching seemed effective, as the veins on the old man’s head bulged even more. He looked like one of those kids infiltrated by angels from that old anime.

“You little—!” the old man exclaimed as he charged forward to argue with Eve. However, she promptly thrust her chopping hand toward his throat.

Blood trickled from his neck as he gulped and froze in place. Eve then declared, “I hate people who misunderstand carrots.”

I’d say it was less that he misunderstood carrots and more that he was

spreading bad ideology in general. To be fair, though, the carrots were what had prompted Eve to intercede in the first place.

“Carrots are delicious regardless of hardship. This low-level’s carrots are delicious.”

“You still don’t know my name? Also, you’re one to talk.”

Upon hearing my rebuttal, Eve circled around behind me and pushed me forward.

“Low-level carrots are delicious,” she said, mimicking my voice.

Holy cow! How did she imitate my voice so well?! Is she a master of impressions?!

Subjected to her taunts, the old man’s veins twitched and bulged yet more. I had to say, it was a rather satisfying sight.

09. The Man Who Protected a City

The three-person party left. The old man made his exit after clicking his tongue and glaring at us resentfully, but the other two had seemed reluctant to follow. Eve was gone now, too. She was the one who had spoiled the mood, but she cared not as she casually nibbled away at her carrot before leaving.

Left alone, Emily and I got to work. We defeated the sleep slimes on B2 and gathered the carrots that they yielded.

Having formed a video game-like party, we efficiently farmed a heap of sleep slimes. In the end, we left a little earlier than planned. Like yesterday, it was too late to make a second trip, but we had gathered enough drops that we were struggling to carry them.

Our day's revenue? 20,000 piro.



"I assume you don't have a magic cart, correct?" Erza asked after we had received our pay for the drops we'd brought to Swallow's Returned Favor.

"A magic cart?"

"It's a necessity. Every proper adventurer has one, you know?" She gestured with her eyes to the other customers.

Now that she mentioned it, the majority of adventurers I'd seen were indeed

dragging carts. Hell, the three-person party from before had something like that, too. If everyone had one, then those must've been the magic carts she'd mentioned—not that I understood what was magical about them.

“What makes them so essential?” I asked her.

“Magic carts come with a lot of convenient features. First off, they can store more than double what their appearance would suggest.”

“Double that?”

“Yes, double,” Erza confirmed.

I took a look at the closest cart. It looked about as big as the carts you'd find at a home improvement store. At a glance, it looked full, yet Erza had claimed that it could actually hold double that.

Not bad.

“They also come equipped with anti-theft measures to prevent anyone other than their owner from removing the contents, and anti-destruction measures to protect them from monster attacks. Oh, and they make it so that you don't feel the weight of the drops you've collected. There are many types and optional features, but those are the basics.”

“Sounds really convenient for dungeoneering, huh?”

“Yep. That's why we call them essential!”

I see. If they have that many features, then essential doesn't even begin to describe them.

I certainly wanted one. I had carried all I could both today and yesterday, but on both days, I had left early when the plan was to stop working at a normal time. If I could carry more regardless of weight, then it followed that I could

make more money.

After running the simulations in my mind, I definitely understood why people considered magic carts essential.

“Where do I get one of those?” I asked Erza.

“There are cart dealers in town. Try one of them.”

“Got it. Thank you,” I said, then left the store.

Emily waited for me beneath the evening light.

“Thanks for waiting,” I said to her.

“Good work today, Yoda.”

“Do you mind if we take a detour on the way home? I want to look at magic carts.”

“Are you planning to buy one?”

“From what I hear, they sound convenient. Have you ever used one, Emily?”

“Just once. When I went into a dungeon with someone else, they owned one.”

“Oh? How was it?”

“Theirs was very classy. It came with an effect that slowly recovered party members’ MP.”

“They have things like that?!”

“It is an option, apparently. Though it’s jaw-droppingly expensive.”

“Oh, yeah, Erza did say something about options...”

If they were that useful, then I absolutely wanted a magic cart. They surely had other handy options, too.

“It has a whole lot of useful effects for adventurers, huh?” I mused.

“Yeah. Some are more for style or fun, but there are lots of ways it can help adventurers get more drops. Everything in this world comes from monster drops, after all.”

“I see.”

I wanted one more and more. So, out of curiosity, I watched the people walking the streets. The more I thought about it, the more carts I noticed.

Adventurers pulling and dragging carts were all over the place. Some carts were even pulled by animals with people riding on them. There really were all kinds.

Oh, yeah. I definitely want one.



But unfortunately, I was reminded that “want” alone gets you nowhere in life.

“Ch-Cheer up, Yoda,” Emily said, trying to console me as I slumped over in abject despair.

We had gone to a magic cart seller, but we were overwhelmed by the sheer price of it. All their carts were in the *millions* of piro. God forbid you added options like monster sense or stat checking on top of that. That only made it more and more expensive, with the latest models easily crossing over 10 million piro. It was like trying to buy an actual car.

“Um, th-they do have used ones...” Emily stammered.

“Used, huh? But used ones probably come with a catch.”

“Erm, right. Actually, the amount of items a cart can hold goes down with use. Sometimes an old cart can even swallow up what you’ve put inside.”

“Geez. Used carts are scary.”

“But they’re really cheap! Some of them are under a hundred thousand piro.”

It didn’t matter how cheap they were if they were too crappy to use. Once again, just like buying a car.

“Well, let’s do our best to save up,” I declared. “Sooner or later, we’ll be able to buy a proper one.”

“Okay!”

I would have to grow stronger until I could produce more expensive items on the deepest floors of dungeons.

With that, I changed my train of thought entirely: I would be living with Emily from now on—in that gentle, warm home that she straightened up for us. As I turned my attention to that fact, my mood already started to improve.

I wanted to head straight home and relax. To rest in our bright, warm home. I truly did *want* to. But suddenly, the city was in an uproar.

“An outsider’s appeared!”

Far away, terrified screams and loud crashes intermingled. People were panicking. I even saw some individuals running away from the area the screams had come from.

“What’s an outsider?” I asked Emily.

“It’s a monster that wanders into the city. Monsters who leave dungeons become more violent than they were before. They attack anything in sight.”

“That’s not good! Wait, why are the adventurers running?”

“Outsiders don’t drop items, so most people refuse to fight them. Monsters only drop items inside of dungeons.”

“What the heck?!”

That was insane. People really refused to fight just because they wouldn’t profit off the battle?

I watched as people ran for their lives. Behind them was a crushed home, and atop it was an enormous gorilla the size of the very home it had destroyed.

“I can’t sit and watch this. Let’s go, Emily!”

“Right!”

I ran toward the commotion with Emily. We sprinted against the flow of people and quickly arrived at the scene of the incident. Monsters were there, surrounded by destroyed buildings. Not just one giant gorilla—but two were wreaking havoc!

This is bad. I didn’t expect two.

As I wondered how to fight them off, a four-person party appeared from the opposite side and attacked one of the monsters.

“Hyahaaah!”

“Formation W.R.E.C.K.! Let’s go!”

“That’s not a real thing!”

“...”

“That’s...” I gasped.

“It’s Eve!” Emily confirmed.

It was Eve, along with her friends (?) who I’d run into that one time. In perfect

rhythm, the four of them piled on attack after attack.

“Wow... They’re all so strong,” Emily said, admiring them.

“Forget that! We need to fight off this one here!”

“Oh! Right!”

Leaving one gorilla to Eve and her party, Emily and I began our assault on the other. I charged in first, prompting the gorilla to swing its arm—which was thicker than a log—down on me.

“Yoda!” Emily screamed.

I warded off the heavy blow head-on. It was so strong that it caused the ground at my feet to collapse and sink in.

“I’m fine! Go, counterattack!”

“Okay!”

Together, Emily and I fought fiercely against the gorilla. It was as strong as its size suggested, equipped with the power to gouge chunks out of the ground and throw destroyed buildings.

We fought with all our strength, since if we lost, there would be even more damage. With that in mind, I knew we had to win.

I struck the gorilla with all my might. I took the brunt of all of its attacks, keeping it in place while Emily swung her giant hammer to ensure that her strikes would hit their mark. When it wasn’t attacking us, I attacked it.

We repeated this until I unleashed my final full-power body blow, felling the beast. Its giant body collapsed and slammed into the ground, causing a tremor.

“Phew,” I sighed. “We barely eked out that win.”

“Well done!”

“Are you okay?”

“Yep!”

Thanks to my efforts, Emily was unwounded, which was a huge relief.

Suddenly remembering the other gorilla, I looked toward Eve’s party. They had defeated their gorilla a good while ago and were now arguing while Eve stared off vacantly.

“Tch, all for nothing. He would’ve at least dropped tuna if he was in a dungeon.”

“A single tuna would hardly be worth it, though, given how strong he was.”

“I know that! Still better than dropping *literally* nothing!”

None of them were injured at all. Their victory was clearly easier-won than ours.

They sure are strong, I thought as the crowd showered us with cheers and gratitude. The residents who had run from the gorillas had come back to thank us. It felt nice to help people and to be appreciated for it.

“Y-Yoda, we should head home soon,” Emily urged, clearly looking flustered. She must not have been used to getting thanked so much. Her awkwardness was adorable. Still, I didn’t want to deal with any more trouble, either. I wanted to go right home and rest in our warm room.

As I got up to do just that, I spotted something before me. The outsider gorilla had dropped an item!

10. Popcorn and C-Words

In the morning, I went on my merry way to Nihonium. I had woken up early and spent much of the morning reflecting on my newfound happiness...until I thought about the past—or more specifically, what had happened on the day I came to this world.

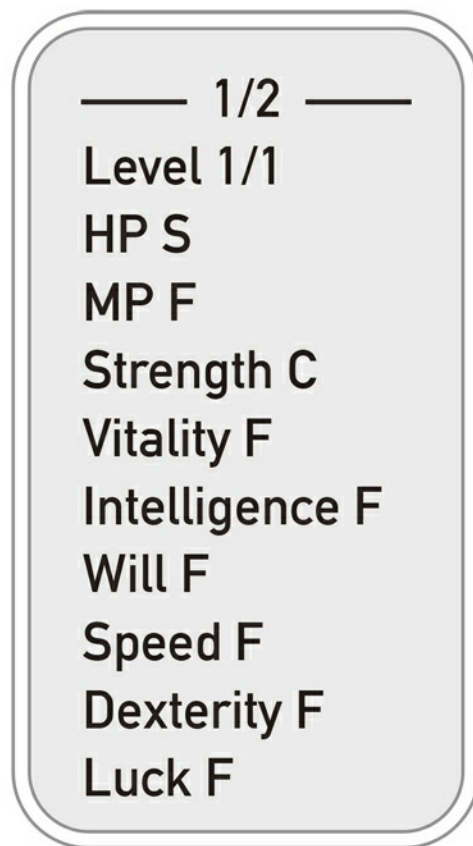
My body had been in poor shape for a few days by then. I got dizzy whenever I stood up, and sometimes, I lost consciousness for a moment. I used dietary supplement drinks to keep my body moving and working.

As usual, I started work early in the morning. Things always got really busy near closing time; work was never over then. While I kept on working, the power went out. My vision started to go white, so I put my head down on my desk in hopes of a little nap...and moments later, I was dropped by a slime!

Y'know, now that I'm thinking about it, it doesn't make much sense.

It made so little sense, in fact, that I had to wonder if I was in the midst of some extended dream. But thinking about it wouldn't answer the question, so I decided not to.

Eventually, I arrived at the dungeon Nihonium. I tried checking my stats on a status board I happened to spot.



Still level 1, but thanks to the seeds, my strength was gradually rising.

I'll do my very best again today! I thought as I entered and descended to the limestone cavern's second floor. At the bottom, I immediately encountered a zombie.

"Ooogh, argh," the zombie groaned like every other one as it attacked.

I had received a certain item drop from that gorilla—that outsider—which all the people of this world had thought could drop no items.

Bang!

The thunderous explosion rang in my ears, the stench of gunpowder smoke pierced my nose, and my hands trembled. Meanwhile, the zombie's head flew right off its body.

In my right hand was a revolver, a weapon not of this world. The gorilla had dropped this weapon and a motherlode of ammunition. My plan today was to test the gun out while I continued farming for seeds.

With its head blown clean off, the zombie died immediately and turned into a seed. I picked up the seed, raised my strength by 1, and searched for the next zombie.

In the distance, I spotted another. I'd say it was about sixty feet away. I readied, aimed, fired...and missed its head. The bullet hit its shoulder instead.

As the zombie staggered, I fired another shot. This time, the perfect headshot pierced right through it.

Two zombies already.

Once I get better at this, I might be able to farm really fast. Now, let's get that seed...

"Whoa!"

When I went to pick up the seed, the wall nearby suddenly crumbled and a zombie appeared from the wreckage. It immediately tackled me and opened its mouth to try to bite.

"Not happening!" I roared as I ripped it off of me and struck it with a front kick. The zombie's body bent in half as it flew away, as if it had been hit by a truck. But that wasn't enough to kill these things! I readied my gun again and—

"Ooogh, argh..."

"Behind me, too?! Damn you!"

Another zombie had grabbed me from behind, so I used a brute-force shoulder throw to slam it into the ground. I then readied my gun and pulled the trigger.

Bang! Bang!

With that, I had shot the heads off of both the zombie at my feet and the one

I had kicked far away.

That had gotten pretty hairy, but I survived. I picked up my three seeds, raised my strength by three, and continued my rounds around the dungeon.

As I went, I killed zombies one after another, testing the combination of martial arts and gunfire I'd been practicing over the past few days. By that afternoon, my strength was a solid B.



I left Nihonium and headed for Tellurium in order to meet up with Emily.

The gun was convenient and powerful. At first, I had worried whether it would work on monsters in a fantasy world, but as the gun fired physical lead bullets with incredible speed, it was as effective as it would have been in my previous life. This would make killing monsters in dungeons a lot more efficient. I'd been worried about getting a weapon after my bamboo spear broke, but now, that was a non-issue.

The problem was ammunition. I had received just under 200 rounds of ammunition from the gorilla that blessed me with this gun. That was plenty of ammo for a normal life, but here, I was fighting monsters daily, so I had already used around 50 bullets just that morning.

I would run out soon if I couldn't replenish them.

"Maybe outsiders are the only way?" I mused.

I had a feeling that I'd figured out how things worked here. People said that Nihonium had no drops, but it gave me seeds that only I could use. People said

that fighting outsiders wasn't worthwhile because they had no drops, but I had received an otherworldly gun and bullets by doing so.

The common keyword here is "no drops."

Outsiders—monsters that left their dungeons and attacked cities. Obviously, it would be best for them not to come at all...but I'd be lying if I said they didn't excite me.



I waited a short while on B2.

"She's not coming."

"Sure isn't."

After meeting up with Emily, I killed a sleep slime and harvested a carrot from it. We awaited Eve with said carrot in hand, but she hadn't appeared.

Emily seemed worried by our resident bunny-girl's absence.

"Do you think something's happened?" she asked.

"She's got work, too. I doubt she can come every single day."

"True..."

"Let's just save this carrot for her. You never know, maybe we'll get home, open the door, and find her inside. Er...maybe not."

Imagining that scenario made me feel a little uncomfortable. Getting home, seeing Eve had broken in and was waiting for a carrot... The fact that I could imagine it and *not* think it was unrealistic was honestly terrifying.

Now somewhat steeled for the worst, I placed the carrot in my bag.

“Let’s go to the next floor today,” I proposed.

“Are you sure we’ll be okay?”

“Yeah. I’ve got a weapon, and my strength is up to B now. I’m a lot stronger in battle, so I figure we might as well give it a try.”

“Okay,” Emily replied, tagging along with a smile. This tiny girl could swing an enormous hammer... She had power equal to a gorilla, but when she wasn’t fighting, she had such a pleasant air to her. Just being with her was relaxing. Truly, she was a soothing presence.

Together, we descended to B3.

“Have you ever been here, Emily?”

“Nope. I only know the monsters’ names and drops.”

“Oh? Let’s hear it.”

“The monsters are cockro slimes. They drop pumpkins.”

Slimes again, huh? I wonder what the cockro part means?

I understood pumpkins. The vegetables dropped by this normal dungeon, like bean sprouts and carrots, were actually normal food. All things in this world were produced inside of dungeons. The items found inside the dungeons were normal, even if the monsters weren’t.

I thought it a little strange that gorillas would drop tuna if killed inside a dungeon, but again, the drops themselves were *normal things*, so I assumed the pumpkins dropped here would be normal, too. And if they were normal pumpkins...

I shot a glance at Emily. The tiny, smiling girl had built up a warm home and

cooked food that warmed both body and heart. She could definitely do it, yeah. I couldn't wait.

Not long into our journey, we ran into a so-called cockro slime. It...was shaped like a slime, but it was small and its black body reflected light like a shell.

Unlike the slimes of previous floors, it didn't bounce around. Instead, it crawled along the ground, making a scuttling noise as it went.

All the air in the room seemed to stagnate. I looked next to me and saw Emily staring directly at the slime. She...was smiling. It looked pleasant, as usual, but something was off.

"Emily...?"

"Yoda," the girl said ominously.

"Y-Yes?!" I yelped.

"I'm killing it."

"Emily, you're a little scary right now!"

Emily raised her hammer, still grinning. She looked the same as ever, but somehow, she was unspeakably terrifying.

I shuddered as Emily dragged her hammer behind her and charged.

Wait, charged?! I've never seen you make the first move, Emily!

Emily swung her hammer down. The ground cracked where the hammer landed. It felt as though it shook the entire dungeon.

Griiiiind!

Then, she ground the hammer against the dungeon floor.

"Huh? Emily, um, I don't think you have to go that far..."

“Don’t be silly, Yoda,” Emily replied as she turned around and grinned. “You have to *really* kill them before they cause more trouble.”

“Y-Yes’m!” I squeaked.

It was incredible how she could look so gentle, yet so scary. Was it just me, or did I see a war god possessing her?

This floor is bad news. We’d better go back up.

As I thought that, however, a scuttling sound rang out from the cracks in the floor. The cockro slime emerged.

“It escaped death,” Emily said in a deadpan.

“Forget it, Emily. Let’s go back up to B2.”

“Yoda.”

“Y-Yeah?”

“You can hate me, but please don’t come to hate drops.”

“I don’t hate you! Please stop before I start to!”

“Haaah!” The girl swung the hammer mercilessly with a powerful roar. It struck the cockro slime with perfect accuracy and shook the dungeon harder.

Pop!

The hammer bounced away. In the spot where the cockroach-sized cockro slime had died, a basketball-sized pumpkin had appeared. Emily had returned to normal, too. It was a good thing she’d gotten the kill before things got any worse.

“Emily, let’s go back!” I pleaded. “I’m in the mood for carrots today.”

“Okay.”

She moved her hammer out of the way and recovered her pumpkin. We then began our trek back to the staircase.

It was jarring to see a normal-sized pumpkin come out of such a small slime. When it dropped, it looked a lot like a popcorn kernel bursting open. It would've been funny if the monster hadn't looked like an actual cockroach. But amid our relief...

Scuttle, scuttle...

Scuttle, scuttle...

Scuttle, scuttle, scuttle, scuttle...

Right as we reached the staircase to the previous floor, a mob of cockro slimes appeared. As the saying went, if you see one, assume you have thirty. We were clearly seeing that in action now.

"Yoda..."

"Yeah?"

"I may lose my humanity today."

"Hey, don't be too hasty! Leave it to me! I'll take care of this!" I exclaimed, stepping in front of Emily before she went mad again.

I can't let her do this!

I wielded my gun and aimed at a slime.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

My concentration was greater than ever.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

I fired away, one-shot-slaughtering cockro slimes at incredible speed with my

heightened concentration. Each bullet was a direct hit, piercing straight through the center of a slime.

“Phew...” I breathed a sigh of relief as I sensed Emily calming down behind me.

Pop, pop, pop, pop, pop, pop!

Immediately after, pumpkins dropped from all of the slimes, popping out like popcorn kernels. And—probably because I had S-rank drops—the pumpkins were far larger than Emily’s. Balance ball-sized pumpkins dropped all over the place.

The popping pumpkin popcorn ended up blocking the way out of the dungeon entirely. Ironically, the very cockro slimes that I had killed in an instant now trapped us.

I desperately tried to console Emily for a good while until, drawn by the scent of carrots, Eve appeared and chopped through the mountain of pumpkins in one slice.

Never again could I bring Emily to B3 of Tellurium.

11. G's Counterattack

The next day, I continued farming zombies on B2 of Nihonium. I was used to handling my gun now, so I could rapid-fire. With my increased accuracy, I could consistently shoot perfect headshots as long as I wasn't ambushed. Plus, I had gotten better at martial arts combos as well.

Punch, kick, throw. Knock them down, then shoot. I had repeated this until it became muscle memory.

"Another ambush?! Nihonium sure is dangerous!"

A wall collapsed and a zombie suddenly attacked out of nowhere. I reached out with my empty right hand and seized its wrist. From there, I lifted it by the neck and shot it right between the eyes.

Being ambushed had scared me, but that was all it had done. As such, I continued hunting zombies and raised my strength to A with their seed drops.



In the afternoon, I went to B3 of Tellurium. Given yesterday's events, I figured coming alone was the best plan of action. Part of my reasoning was that I'd noticed how all of the female adventurers passing through, both ascending and descending, were heading straight for the next staircase. Almost all of the women were getting the hell out of here.

A cockro slime appeared. It looked like a slime, but it was about half the size

of the palm of my hand. They had shiny black bodies, and they made a scuttling sound when they moved.

Yep, I could see why women hated them. And yet, I merely saw them as great target practice.

I readied my gun, aimed...and fired!

Missed!

My shot hit the ground of the cavern, sending pebbles flying.

Scuttle, scuttle...

The slime approached and jumped.

“Whoa!” I exclaimed as I swiftly dodged.

That was terrifying!

It had leaped straight at my face. For an instant, my vision was like seventy percent cockroach. My pulse pounded madly. These were worse for my heart than those zombie ambushes!

I tightened up, raised my gun, set my aim...

Bang! Pow! Pop!

This time, the bullet pierced right through the cockro slime, which dropped a huge pumpkin in turn. No matter how many times I saw that happen, it always reminded me of popcorn when something smaller than my hand suddenly became a balance ball-sized pumpkin.

The slimes themselves were creepy, but it was fun to watch them drop pumpkins.

Just then, another mob of cockro slimes appeared.

If you see one, assume you have thirty.

It...wasn't quite thirty of them, but almost. Luckily, Emily wasn't present, so it wouldn't matter if I blocked the exit. As such, I took deep breaths and focused my body and soul on firing away.



I had less than fifty bullets left by the time I'd cleaned up the mob of cockro slimes. Like yesterday, their pumpkins dropped all at once, covering the entire path through the dungeon.

I hauled them all out to the front of the dungeon and called out to Emily.

"Another big haul today, hmm?" she asked.

"You've got that right. About as many as yesterday."

"Yesterday... Hmm, I believe they sold for about ten thousand piro each?"

"Exactly."

In terms of price per gram, pumpkins and bean sprouts were about equal, but these pumpkins were *massive*. Dense, too, so they were really heavy.

Erza was overjoyed to buy them, since they could be wholesaled to kitchens and the like. That was what had led to them being 10,000 piro each, as Emily had mentioned.

Between yesterday's haul and today's, selling them all would net us a grand total of 500,000 piro. That was some fat revenue.

Five hundred thousand, huh? That could be enough to buy a used magic cart.

Wait, but maybe it would be put to better use moving into a nicer apartment. No, before I do any of that, I should treat Emily to a good meal as a reward for a job well done.

After imagining a few uses for the money, I started to get a little excited.

“Let’s put our backs into it and get to hauling,” I said to Emily.

“Okay!”

We hauled pumpkins to Erza and sold them. Then, we returned to grab more from our pile and sold those. Each one was dozens of pounds, but both me and my 4’3” friend could carry them just fine. Emily always carried around that huge hammer, but my lifting abilities were all thanks to raising my strength through seeds.

We kept on hauling until we arrived for our last trip, at which point we witnessed a shocking sight. A mob of tiny black things had formed around the last two pumpkins. I could tell even from afar that they were cockro slimes.

Holes had formed all over the giant pumpkins. It seemed they were being eaten by the slimes.

Slimes outside of the dungeon?

“Yoda...”

“Ack...!”

Suddenly remembering the crisis at hand, I turned to Emily. She was expressionless as she stared at the pumpkins.

“Those pumpkins...are too far gone now.”

“Hold on, Emily, don’t get carried away! The pumpkins are no good, sure.”

“So this...is the moment I was born for,” Emily said, picking up her hammer

from where she'd left it.

That's a little extreme, don't you think?

"Emily, wait! I'll take care of it!"

"But..."

"It's okay. Just stay back," I said as I held Emily back and stepped forward.

Good grief! Who knew cockro slimes could just wander out of a dungeon!

I gripped my gun tight and charged toward the giant pumpkins. I didn't have much ammo left, so if I missed now, Emily would be in even worse shape.

I focused even harder than yesterday. As I charged, I shot the cockro slimes that scattered from the pumpkins. Knowing that things would end up badly if I let them escape, I started with the ones trying to flee. I fired and fired away, killing slime after slime.

Click! Click!

"Kh! Out of bullets, huh?"

"So I truly was born for this—"

"Haaah!"

I stowed the gun and punched the pumpkin. In the process, I hit a cockro slime that was hidden inside it.

Squick!

I didn't like how that felt, but now wasn't the time to care. I had to do this.

"Raaah!" I roared as I punched the slimes.

With all my strength, I punched pumpkin and slime alike. By the time I'd turned the pumpkins into mush, the slimes had been eradicated.

I did it... I really did it. What a relief.

I glanced at Emily and saw relief on her face as well.

I'm just glad I didn't have to make her do it.

Still, why were these cockro slimes outside? And how was it related to the dropped pumpkins they were swarming? Did they spawn when dropped items were left alone outside of dungeons, maybe?

As I turned over the question in my mind...

Pop!

Pop, pop!

Pop, pop, pop, pop, pop, pop!

The dead cockro slimes dropped items one after another: the very bullets I had been using before. Come to think of it, they counted as outsiders since they had appeared outside of their dungeon, right?

As such, in exchange for the loss of 20,000 piro and the near-loss of Emily's humanity, I received almost five hundred bullets from the outsiders.

12. Dropless Monster in a Dropless Place

I headed back to Swallow's Returned Favor, which was as busy as ever, and told Erza about what I'd seen.

"You didn't know? When dropped items are left in places with no people around, they begin to spawn monsters."

"Oh, sorry..." I had no way of knowing that, since I had just come to this world, but I still apologized because it seemed like common sense. "Does that mean outsiders are essentially man-made disasters?"

"Yes, actually. Of course, there *are* exceptions..."

"Oh?"

"Say a storm comes and your belongings are tossed outdoors."

"Oh... I see... I see..."

That would create outsiders, then. In short, if you abandoned a drop in an empty place, it'd revert to being the monster it came from.

"Even inside dungeons?" I confirmed.

"Yes, even inside dungeons."

"Huh."

I organized this new information in my mind. If that was the case...

"Say, Ryota? If you're free, why don't we g-go out for dinner tonight?! I found this wonderful restaurant—"

"Thanks, Erza! I'll be back!"

I wanted to experiment with this new information immediately, so I excitedly ran out of the store.

If I can put this into practice...

In my excitement, I had totally lost sight of my surroundings.



Once Ryota was gone, Erza stared in devastation at the door. Her coworker, Ina, walked over.

“Turned you down again, huh? Oof!”

“He didn’t turn me down! Ryota just had important business to attend to.”

“Hahaha! Aww, don’t pout!”

“I’m not pouting! I happen to like Ryota more when he’s in such a good mood.”

“Wowww! How about you get a room? Oh! Welcome, welcome!”

Sadness still in her eyes, Erza gazed at the door Ryota had just rushed through.



I killed a sleep slime on B2 of Tellurium, retrieved the resulting carrot, and took it to the surface.

Why not a pumpkin, you ask? Well, I didn’t want to repeat that calamity a

third time. I could definitely see Emily randomly passing by if I'd used a pumpkin instead. And so, I chose to use a carrot. The item itself didn't matter; hell, it could've even been a bean sprout. What mattered was that I was going to intentionally spawn an outsider.

When I defeated outsiders, I got drops that weren't meant to be in this world. When I killed a gorilla, I received a gun. When I killed cockro slimes, I received ammo.

Bullets were consumed on use, so it was important to restock them. If I could create outsiders at will, then I could restock whenever I wanted. With that hope in my heart, I put the carrot down in a place devoid of people and waited just far enough away that I could barely see it.

Let's see how this works.

Then, as I waited...

"I wuv carrots!" Eve exclaimed, appearing out of nowhere and picking the carrot up off the ground to eat.

"I wasn't fishing for yooou!" I screamed.

She nibbled away at it in a manner reminiscent of some rodent.

"Why are you eating the carrot?!"

"Because it's yours, low level."

"Stop calling me that! And why are you eating *that* carrot?!"

"We eat carrots because they are there."

"Yeah, yeah," I groaned in surrender. "It's my fault for not realizing the carrot would call you here, I guess."

"Apology accepted. Want some?"

“No, I don’t!”

“Good. I wasn’t going to share it with you anyway.”

“Why not?!”

“Carrots exist for us rabbits. Heaven and earth may part, but my carrots will remain firmly in my hands.”

“That’s the most complex sentence I’ve ever heard you say, and *that’s* what you make it about?!”

The bunny-girl Eve nibbled away at the carrot with a smug look on her face. Her ears bobbed up and down.

“It’s a good thing I brought more,” I said as I sighed and put down a backup carrot.

She’s staring at the carrot and drooling!

“Stay,” I commanded. “Cut that out right now.”

“But carrot—”

“Fine. You can have this one,” I said, handing her another backup carrot.

Eve looked back and forth at the carrot in her hands and the one on the ground.

“That’s a carrot, and this is a carrot,” she declared.

“Seriously? Okay, how about you take your carrot over to Emily?”

“Emily...”

“She can whip up something delicious with it.”

“Carrot... Emily... A goddess is born.”

“That’s going a little far!”

Heedless of my rebuttal, Eve took her new carrot and left.

Phew. That's one problem dealt with.

I looked at the carrot and thought for a moment. I then casually dug a hole in the ground and buried the carrot inside. From there, I backed off and watched the spot where the hole had been.

Now it was waiting time. Just as I thought it might not work...

Fwump!

A slime spawned from the ground. It was one of the sleep slimes that inhabited B2 of Tellurium.

"I've been waiting for thiiiis!" I roared as I seized my gun and leaped at the sleep slime.

Bang! Pop!

After being shot through, the sleep slime dropped ten bullets.

"I did it!"

I couldn't help but cheer. The experiment was a huge success. Now I could create outsiders at will and maintain a secure flow of bullets that otherwise didn't exist in this world. This was major progress.

I thought it would suck if I had to wait for an outsider and it dropped nothing, but I was over the moon to have discovered this method.

"Hmm? Waaait a second... No drops?"

In a flash, inspiration flooded my mind.



B2 of Nihonium.

A zombie ambushed me, so I felled it with a headshot. Its head flew off, and it dropped a seed. I picked up the seed, and my strength went up by 1.

These zombies were also seen as dropless monsters. When I killed monsters that people of this world received no drops from in dungeons, I received seeds—similar to what happened when I killed outsiders.

So, I wondered... What if a zombie could be an outsider?

I had come to Nihonium to figure that out, but there was an issue: when I picked up seed drops, they disappeared.

If I couldn't take them outside, then I couldn't make outsiders from them. That was a problem when the seeds were used up as soon as I touched them.

I went back to B1. After a short search, I found a skeleton. Since it was all bones, there wasn't much to aim at, but I calmed down and took it down using my trusty gun.

It dropped a seed.

Ryota's max HP rose by 0!

That was a disappointing result. My HP was already at its maximum, rank S, so I'd thought maybe I could carry the seed. Instead, the seed disappeared fruitlessly. I couldn't carry it outside.

So it won't work? And here I thought it'd be fun to see what sort of outsider drop I'd get from these dropless monsters.

Too bad. Sometimes, things just don't work out.

I had refilled my ammo already, so I decided I might as well go back to Tellurium and earn the day's keep. With that, I moved to leave Nihonium. However, just as I reached the entrance and began to wonder if the seed might've changed my S in HP to an SS, a wall crumbled and a skeleton popped out.

"Seriously?! Man, Nihonium monsters sure love their ambushes!" I exclaimed, kicking the skeleton before it could grab me.

The skeleton went flying directly out of the dungeon.

"Whoops! It'll turn into— Huh?"

The skeleton disappeared. A second after it exited the dungeon, it turned into mist and faded.

What was all that about? I thought as I cocked my head in confusion.



First Tellurium, then Nihonium. I performed a few experiments on these dungeons and found one more simple natural law: monsters could only survive on their home floor.

They couldn't willingly step onto other floors to begin with, but if they were launched onto another floor, they would immediately disappear. They'd only become outsiders if their drops were abandoned outside of dungeons, as they would instantly die if they left their dungeon normally.

To repeat, leaving their floor or dungeon meant instant death. All monsters,

without exception, followed that law.



I waited at the entrance to B1 of Nihonium. Waited, and waited...and waited. As it turned out, monsters didn't come at you often if you waited for them. After an entire hour of waiting, a skeleton finally emerged from the ground and attacked me.

"Haaah!"

I seized its feeble wrist and threw it outside. Then, before it could land, I aimed my gun and fired. I focused my mind and struck its bones multiple times in the span of a second. The bullets shattered the skeleton's body.

And then...

Pop!

It dropped a bullet! A dropless monster, outside of a dropless dungeon, had dropped an item! I retrieved it and put it in the gun. Part of me was certain that this was no ordinary bullet. I pointed the gun at a tree outside of the dungeon and pulled the trigger.

When the bullet struck the tree, a magic circle expanded from the point of impact. Immediately after, the tree became a giant chunk of ice.

A freeze round...

A name for it naturally came to mind.

A magic bullet!



13. Biohazard

The next morning, I went to Nihonium. But instead of going to B2, I remained on B1. I didn't go far inside, either. Instead, I remained right at the entrance. There, I waited for a skeleton to emerge. When it approached, I shoved it out of the dungeon and shot it to death.

If I killed them outside the dungeon before they died on their own, I received a freeze round. There wasn't much surface area on skeletons that I could aim at, so I had to shoot them a good five times each on average. That meant exchanging five regular bullets for one freeze round. I didn't mind that exchange rate, as I could get limitless regular bullets from outsider sleep slimes.

The real problem was that waiting for skeletons took forever. By the way, I had tried hauling skeletons out from deeper within, but I'd usually end up counterattacking the struggling skeleton and defeating it by accident. Thus, waiting was, unfortunately, the most effective method.

I continued this throughout the morning and obtained ten freeze rounds for my efforts. It took a long time to get them, so I knew I'd have to use them sparingly.



In the afternoon, I met up with Emily on B2 of Tellurium.

We killed sleep slimes together as a party. My gunshots and Emily's hammer

strikes alike could one-shot them. Our carrot farm was running well. We were going to make a nice profit today.

Since things are going well...I might as well try this while the enemies are still weak, right?

“Emily.”

“Yes?”

“I’ll cover you. Next slime you see, just charge at it.”

“Understood.”

Instead of asking about the details, Emily outright agreed. She had extreme faith in me, I realized, which honestly made me pretty happy.

A short walk later, a sleep slime appeared directly ahead. There was about fifty feet between us. Emily promptly charged at it with her giant hammer at the ready. When she got fifteen feet away from the slime, she leaped off the ground and swung her hammer down.

I put a bullet in the chamber of my gun and aimed. Fully focused, I pulled the trigger. The bullet hit square in the middle of the sleep slime. And as it did, a magic circle spread, freezing the slime in a hunk of ice twice as big as it was.

Emily neither wavered nor faltered, swinging her hammer straight down upon the foe.

Pow!

The impact shook the dungeon, shattering the frozen slime to bits and heralding the appearance of a carrot.

This could prove useful. I stop the enemy with a freeze round, and while it’s stuck, Emily clocks it good.

This was a pattern I'd learned from video games, but it seemed useful here as well. The catch was how effective these freeze rounds were, though.

Which enemies could be frozen? Was it limited to enemies of specific strength or type? What was the range? I needed to find answers to those questions, or else I might run into trouble using the rounds when we needed them most.

There was no real rush, however. Getting freeze rounds may have taken a long time, but the process was easy. I could get them and test them out when time permitted.

With that in mind, I picked up the carrot.

Emily's eyes sparkled as she asked, "Yoda, what was that?! It was incredible!"

"As you saw, it's a bullet that freezes the enemy it strikes. My stock is limited, though, so I can't be using them willy-nilly."

"It's still incredible!"

The freeze round combo was a huge success.

After that experiment, we farmed as many carrots as we could carry—about 20,000 piro's worth—and moved to leave the dungeon. As we reached the first floor and prepared to exit, I realized there was a downpour outside. The rain was coming down almost sideways, and each strong gust of wind blew more of it into the dungeon.

Crack! Booom!

The sky lit up in the distance. Seconds later, thunder rumbled.

"It's raining," Emily noted.

"Yeah, it's terrible out there."

“We won’t be able to leave like this.”

“Guess we’ll have to wait for it to end... Oh, the carrots will be fine, right?” I asked.

“Yes,” Emily, who had been working alongside me all the time lately, answered promptly to soothe my worries. “Outsiders don’t appear around people. We’ll be with the carrots the whole time, so it’ll be all right.”

“Right. That’s good.”

As I sat on the ground with my gun in hand, ready to shoot any slimes that might come our way, I gazed outside. It was a real downpour out there. The ditches that I could see had water flowing through them like tiny streams. It wasn’t unlike a typhoon.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if some places collapsed under rain like this,” I mused.

“When it rains this hard, some homes *do* collapse,” Emily answered.

“I hope our crappy apartment makes it through the storm.”

“I’m sure it will be fine. Besides, Nazarov is nearby. Cyclo can buy building materials from that city at a low price.”

“Really? Oh, you must mean that Nazarov has dungeons that drop building materials, right? And since it’s pretty close, shipping is cheap?”

“Yes,” she confirmed.

Aha!

It felt like I was starting to understand this world bit by bit. All things were dropped, or *produced*, in dungeons. As such, human occupations had evolved based on that.

For example, Cyclo had five dungeons full of vegetables, so we could buy them for cheap. In exchange, meat and alcohol, which had to be shipped from faraway towns, were rather expensive. Supply chains weren't especially developed here, so price directly correlated to distance. Luckily, I was starting to get a grasp of exactly how that worked.



It took until dawn for the rain to stop.

On our way back to Cyclo that morning, we stumbled across a bit of a commotion. It was a heated discussion between two men, one middle-aged and one younger. The middle-aged man seemed very “new money,” with gaudy clothing and flashy rings and necklaces. The younger one looked to be an ordinary adventurer. They were arguing next to a cliff.

Curious, I approached and asked, “What’s the matter, guys?”

“We had a bit of a cargo accident during yesterday’s storm,” the young adventurer answered.

“A cargo accident?”

That was an unfamiliar phrase. I looked to Emily for an answer.

“As you know, Cyclo is an agricultural city, where all five dungeons drop items related to agriculture. We rely on imports from other cities to help us cover our other needs.”

“Right,” I agreed. “We were talking about that last night.”

“Sometimes, accidents happen during shipping. When we say ‘cargo

accident,' we typically mean that the cargo has fallen somewhere, washed away, or been otherwise lost."

"Fall? Oh, you mean like off this cliff?" I asked, quickly realizing why they were arguing in front of a cliff.

They nodded. I approached and glanced down off the precipice. It was a pretty high cliff. About sixty feet below, I saw what looked like a magic cart.

"And your cargo fell down there?" I asked them.

"During last night's storm, yes."

"I see..."

It was a good thing Emily and I had spent the night in the dungeon. If we had tried to make our way home, we could've lost all of the carrots we'd worked so hard to gather. If these guys had lost their stuff when it was securely inside a magic cart, there was no way we would've done better.

Yep. I'm glad we didn't try to go—

"Wait!" I gasped. "If that stuff is at the bottom of this cliff, then...?!"

"Right. Given enough time, it'll all become outsiders."

"Oh no!"

Remembering that, I saw how urgent the situation truly was. I looked to the cliff again. Nobody was at the bottom, and the stuff was more than sixty feet away from us. At this rate, the whole pile of cargo would become a gaggle of outsiders.

"We're fortunate that this happened out in the wild, at least."

"Yes," Emily agreed. "Since we're this far out, it won't lead to immediate damages. Whatever does appear, we can deal with it quickly."

It would lead to a loss of cargo, but that was preferable to letting anyone get hurt. Unfortunately, the adventurers would not allow me to be satisfied with that knowledge.

“Those items were dropped by feminis,” the young adventurer chimed in.

“Feminis?” I repeated.

Emily shook her head. Apparently, she hadn’t heard of them either. I looked at the man and urged him to explain with my eyes.

“They’re a kind of monster that’s invisible, with no set form. You can only get a glimpse of them when they attack.”

Were they gaseous or spirits, then?

He continued, “Their attacks are pretty strong, but the really annoying thing is that they can possess humans and use them as seedbeds. Men and women alike can end up possessed and impregnated with tons of their babies.”

“Eww...”

That really squicked me out. What an awful thought. They sounded legitimately terrifying.

“As such, we’ll need to deal with it before all those goods become outsiders. But...” The young man trailed off as he looked at the rich man.

“Don’t you dare!” his client screeched. “Do you realize how much that cargo cost?! Why, production alone was three million piro!”

“But if we don’t burn it now and it all turns into outsiders—”

“Instead, how about you tell us how to haul that stuff up?”

“You can’t!” the young man insisted. “Look at it! It’s stuck between rocks, and worse, see how far down it is?! Lifting it would be impossible. We need to

destroy it at once.”

The men fought. The young adventurer argued that it needed to be burned before it caused a catastrophe, while the rich guy complained about the cost and demanded an alternative.

I understood both sides, but of course, I agreed with burning it. If a mob of dangerous monsters formed, it would pose a significant threat, so we needed to—

Crap! It's already too late!

“Let's just— Whoa!” the rich man suddenly screamed. His back arched, he shuddered, and he began frothing at the mouth. I could faintly see something clinging to his body.

“Haaah!” the young adventurer roared as he held out his hand and unleashed an arrow of fire—flame magic. Unfortunately, the arrow missed, since the rich man had evaded it with shocking speed. His motions weren't those of a human man, however; he was being controlled.

“Uorgraaah!” he shrieked.

I whipped out my gun and fired, but the man was so fast that I completely missed. He was moving even faster than a cockro slime! I loaded more bullets and continued firing as fast as I could.

After firing madly until I was down twenty bullets, I had finally defeated the monster.

The outsider dropped bullets, but now wasn't the time to bend down and pick them up. I rushed to look down the precipice with the young man. The things inside the cart were beginning to break, and each one let out *something* when it did.

“S-Stop...” the merchant groaned. “That’s worth so much...”

“You’re still going on about– Grah!”

This time, the young man started screaming. I wasted no time thinking and fired away, trying to hit the thing surrounding him. After I’d finished, the man fell to the ground like a puppet with its wires cut. Bullets fell along with him, as the monster had been defeated.

It wasn’t clear whether he was still alive, but I didn’t have the time to check. I looked down again and faintly saw more monsters. It was as if the cart itself was spewing them outward.

“Emily, run!” I shouted as I reloaded my gun.

The word “impregnated” had instilled raw terror in me. I pointed the gun down and placed my finger on the trigger.

“Oh!”

But before I pulled it, I remembered something and reloaded it with the new ammo I’d obtained. I had wanted to experiment on it more before doing this, but I might not get another chance!

And so, I shot all of the freeze rounds in my possession at the magic cart, the source of the outsiders. Instantly after, an enormous hunk of ice formed around the cart.

A crowd of now-translucent femini monsters was trapped inside. They looked like konjac in jelly.

“Haaaaaah!” Emily leaped forward, jumping off of the sixty-foot cliff, and swung her hammer down with all her might!

POW!

Gravitational acceleration combined with the force of her enormous hammer, crushing the frozen cart and feminis alike in one blow.

“Emily!” I screamed.

The many monsters disappeared, dropping nothing. Among them, the girl stood proud.

“We got the job done!” she said, flashing me the biggest smile I’d ever seen.

14. 4'3" and a Hammer

"Emily! Are you hurt at all?!" I asked, flustered, after helping her back onto the cliff.

"We did it!"

"Are...? Er, you what?"

"I smashed the ice after you froze it."

"Oh. *We* did it. The thing we did in the dungeon."

I recalled how we had defeated the sleep slime. I'd frozen it with a freeze round, then Emily had finished it with her hammer. That was exactly like what we'd done just now.

She was saying...that she did that. Got it.

Emily stared at me. She wasn't speaking, but I could almost hear her saying, *How was it? Great, right? Come on, praise me!*

Right... Yeah, I should do that.

"Well done, Emily. You shattered them in one hit!" I praised her.

"I could only put all of my strength into it because the monsters couldn't move."

"That was still awesome. You obliterated that massive hunk of ice and all the stuff inside with just one swing!"

"Hehehe..." Emily chuckled as she looked down bashfully, grinning from the overt praise. I had worried about her in the moment, but she really gave it her

all, so she deserved to be complimented.

Suddenly, she gasped, “Oh!”

“What is it, Emily?”

“I’ve leveled up.”

“Leveled up? Oh, I suppose you *did* defeat all of those femini monsters.”

“It...went way up, actually,” she explained, her eyes widening in surprise.

“Oh?”

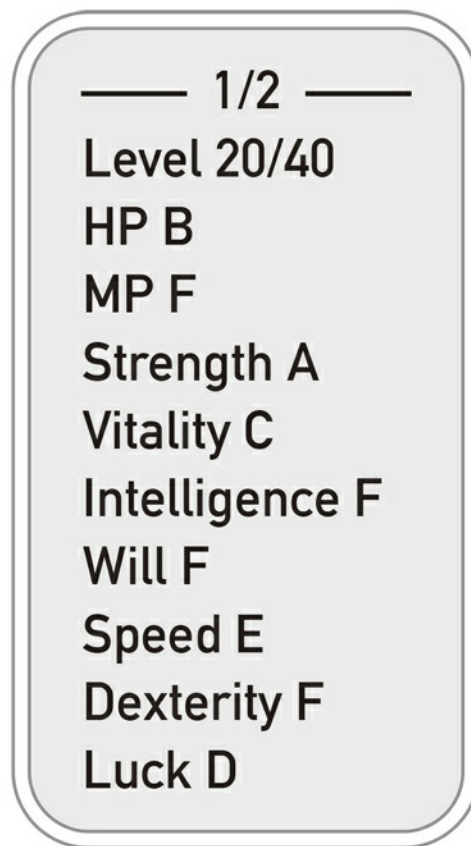
My curiosity was piqued.



We returned to Cyclo. After taking the two men to the hospital and selling the carrots, we went to check Emily’s stats.

Unlike in dungeons, city status boards cost money to use. Free in dungeons, yet costly in the city—a pretty weird setup, in my opinion, but given the fact that everything in the world was produced in dungeons, I could see the logic behind it.

We used 100 piro at said status board to check Emily’s stats.



“Your level’s gone way up!”

“Yes. It’s very high now.”

“It looks like...you went up sixteen or seventeen at once?”

We gazed at the stats displayed on the board. When we’d first met, she was level 3, but she was all the way up to level 20 now!

“Are feminis really strong monsters, you think?” I asked.

“I don’t know...”

“I remember you didn’t know what they were. That does make sense, since the goods they came from were imported.”

Emily didn’t know, but I was certain that must have been the cause. In an instant, all of the items in the magic cart had turned into outsiders. That was when I’d fired all of my freeze rounds to freeze them, and Emily had smashed them to bits.

Emily, with a low level yet very high power, had killed a mob of frozen

monsters all at once. As a result, she'd been powerleveled. That was a common sight in games.

This was all my speculation, but it was probably right. Though, what really mattered was that Emily's stats had skyrocketed along with her level. Her eyes shone like never before in a display of unmatched excitement.



Some time later, Emily brought me to Arsenic, one of Cyclo's five dungeons. But when we went inside, I was a little surprised.

"That's a lot of monsters!"

There was an uncharacteristically large number of monsters around as soon as I entered the place. It was downright crawling with them.

The dungeon, its form like a hole dug into the ground, had rocks strewn across the floor—rocks both big and small, some large enough to sit on and others as small as baseballs. And...all of them had eyes and mouths.

Each rock had a face turned our way. I could tell that there were more than a hundred such rocks. Having so many eyes turned toward me in a dungeon was honestly a little scary. Thus, knowing that these rocks must have been monsters, I whipped out my revolver and fired. However, the first bullet was deflected. Despite having faces, they were as hard as their appearance suggested.

"That's annoying... Hey, what the hell?"

While I tried to figure out whether to fire or to defeat them some other way, I

noticed that the monsters weren't moving. None of them had moved to begin with, but even the one I'd fired at—one big enough to sit on—remained immobile.

It had moved its eyes enough for me to know it was staring at me, but no more.

I turned and asked Emily, "What's their deal?"

"These monsters are called dante rocks. All the monsters in Arsenic are immobile like them."

"All of them?"

"Yes, all of them. Until the very last floor, anyway."

"Then you can just kill as many as you want, right? Or...are they super hard?" I asked, recalling the deflected bullet.

"Right. They are monsters, but because they don't attack, you kill them the same way you would break a rock. But since they are extremely hard, the number of people who can defeat them is limited."

"I see..." I mumbled as I looked at the so-called dante rocks. "They don't attack, huh?"

"That's right," Emily replied as she approached one and patted its head (?). The rock glared at her in apparent anger, but didn't attack. Neither did it move, let alone run away. It had eyes and a mouth, and they moved, but that was it. Indeed, it wasn't dangerous at all.

"Let's see if I'm up to the challenge," Emily said.

"The challenge? Oh, because your strength is A now?" I asked her.

I remembered what had happened before—how Emily had leveled all the way

up to 20, and how her strength had grown to A in the process. It had started at C, one of her highest stats, though still not particularly good. With these level increases, however, it had grown to the highest value possible for people of this world.

I see. So that's why we're here, huh?

"I'll try it now," she declared.

"Do your best!"

"I will!" Emily exclaimed eagerly as I cheered her on.

The 4'3" girl lifted the hammer, which was bigger than her own body...and slammed it down. The rock monster was shattered to bits.

"I did it!"

"That was awesome. You crushed it in one blow."

"I put all my strength into shattering it."

"Let's see what it dropped... Oh, a dandelion?"

"Indeed," Emily replied, picking up the fallen dandelion with a huge smile.
"Arsenic's monsters all produce flower drops."

"All flowers? And the monsters are all rock-types?"

"Yes."

"Wowww..."

Smash a rock and get a flower. Crazy.

"By the way, is there an all-fruit dungeon?"

"Yes."

"I see."

It was becoming clear that each dungeon had particular leanings. Tellurium had slimes, Nihonium had undead monsters, and Arsenic had rock monsters. Thus, their drops probably had particular leanings, too. Tellurium dropped vegetables, Nihonium dropped the stat-raising seeds, and this place had flowers.

I repeated what I'd learned so far, saying, "Then when you want to farm veggies, you go to Tellurium. When you want to bring flowers home, you go to Arsenic."

"Correct! But there *are* exceptions."

"Exceptions like?"

"The monsters on B5 of Tellurium drop watermelons, so they're not all vegeta—"

"Oh, about that," I made an awkward face and interjected. "Watermelons are actually vegetables."

"Whaaat?!" Emily screeched, looking shaken to the core.

I felt a little bad, but watermelons were vegetables. It was better to tell her the truth.



I followed Emily for a while as she went around crushing one dante rock after another.

They were monsters, but since they didn't move, it felt less like defeating them and more like breaking them. She broke rock after rock after rock,

occasionally getting dandelions and occasionally not.

Emily had low drop rates, so they didn't drop every single time, but she had still collected a respectable amount because she was extremely efficient at breaking the rocks.

Along the way, other adventurers arrived and used blunt weapons to smash them as she had, but...they clearly weren't as effective as Emily. She could break five while they struggled to break one.

Emily energetically ran about, breaking rocks and obtaining dandelions as if she was mining for them.

She earned 5,000 piro that day. Thus, she decided to make visiting Arsenic a part of her daily routine going forward.

15. A Drop-Doubling Ring

Today, I did as I usually did and went to Tellurium in the afternoon to meet up with a grinning Emily at the entrance. We then entered the dungeon together.

We immediately ran into a monster, so I reflexively whipped out my revolver.

“Huh? This slime looks weird,” I mused.

“Oh, that is called a slime bro.”

“Slime bro...?” I mumbled as I lowered my gun and probed my memories. I had heard the name before. Early on, at that. “That’s...the thing that dropped me, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” Emily confirmed with certainty.

The slime lackadaisically rolling about in front of me was like the bean sprout-dropping ones I was used to, but it was a slightly different color and longer horizontally.

I see. This is the rare monster that brought me here from my old world, huh?

“Whoa, a rare monster!” someone shouted. “Oh... Beaten to the punch, huh?”

While I gazed at the slime from the entrance, other adventurers came in from outside and passed by, looking a little disappointed as they walked further into the dungeon.

“What was that?” I asked Emily.

“Rare monsters are seen as ‘first-come, first-served.’ Other adventurers are

free to defeat them if you fail, but even I can defeat a slime bro.”

“So they figured waiting would be a waste of time and gave up?”

Rare monsters are first-come, first-served. Another rule of this world, I guess.
Noted.

“Well, let’s kill this thing,” I said as I readied my gun again and aimed.

But then, I wondered—should I defeat this slime inside or outside the dungeon? Unlike people born in this world, I had a drop rate of S, giving me unusual item drops. That was true both inside and outside dungeons. Furthermore, item drops differed when a monster was killed inside versus outside a dungeon.

I wavered for a moment, but then quickly recalled what I’d learned from the cockro slimes: normal items could be taken outside of a dungeon and turned into outsiders, so the correct order of things was to kill this slime bro inside the dungeon first.

“Yoda?”

“Sorry. I’ll kill it now.”

“Okay.”

Excited to see what it would drop, I fired a round into the slime bro. Though it was a rare monster, it was still on B1, so it was weak enough to die in a single shot.

The slime bro disappeared...and out came a ring. I stooped down and picked it up.

“Oh. Double drops, huh?” I mused.

“Is that so? How did you know?”

“It just kind of appeared in my mind.”

Indeed, it *appeared*. When I picked up the ring, I recalled the information as if it had always been in my mind.

This ring was equipment. When you defeated monsters with it equipped, you would receive double the drops.

“I had no idea such a thing existed,” Emily said.

“You’ve never heard of one?”

“Nope.”

“Hmm...”

Might as well give it a test run, right?

I tried to put my finger through it, but my hand slipped and I ended up dropping it. The ring fell at Emily’s feet, so she picked it up and held it out to me.

“Here you go.”

“You can hold it?”

I was a little surprised.

“Hmm?”

“Unlike the seeds, you can hold it... Emily, try putting that on.”

“You want me to wear it?”

“Yeah.”

“Understood,” Emily said, then tried the ring on.



Emily and I put a hold on our daily carrot-farming operations and returned to B1 of Arsenic. She had the ring now, after all. If we wanted to test its drop effect, then this was the best place to do it.

“I’ll start now,” she declared.

“Good luck.”

Armed with my support, Emily smiled, hoisted her hammer, and walked over to the dandelion-dropping dante rocks.

Since my strength was A thanks to my seed-farming, I decided to try kicking a small rock at my feet, but it was too hard. Even with A-rank strength, rock monsters were too tough to deal with without a proper weapon. Or if not too tough, too inefficient to bother. Abandoning the thought of staying in this dungeon myself, I watched over Emily instead.

Raise hammer, swing, pow!

Raise hammer, swing, pow.

Pow, pow, ker-pow!

Emily energetically shattered rock after rock. She went on without stopping, so I followed her and recovered the drops as she continued on the warpath.

Pow, pow, pow!

After about an hour of running around B1, she had crushed nearly two hundred dante rocks.

Now that I had enough data, I concluded that wearing the ring did not change one’s drop rates. Instead, it doubled each individual drop received. It had

become clear even early on that the percentage of monsters who dropped dandelions was no different from yesterday, but the number of items per drop had increased.

I called Emily to stop her and communicated my theory.

“This ring is incredible!” she said, delighted.

“It sure is. Your productivity should double outright thanks to that.”

“Yeah!” Emily said as she smiled, took off the ring, and held it out to me.

I stared at it for a while before finally saying, “Just keep wearing it.”

“Huh? But...”

“Now that I’ve gotten a better look at it, I think it suits you more.”

“A-Are you sure?”

“Yeah.”

To be totally honest, I was a little captivated by the sight of Emily wearing the drop-doubling ring as she smashed rocks. It might have been more effective if I wore it. For example, it would double my seed drops at Nihonium. But I thought Emily should have it. Plus, it really did look better on her, anyway.

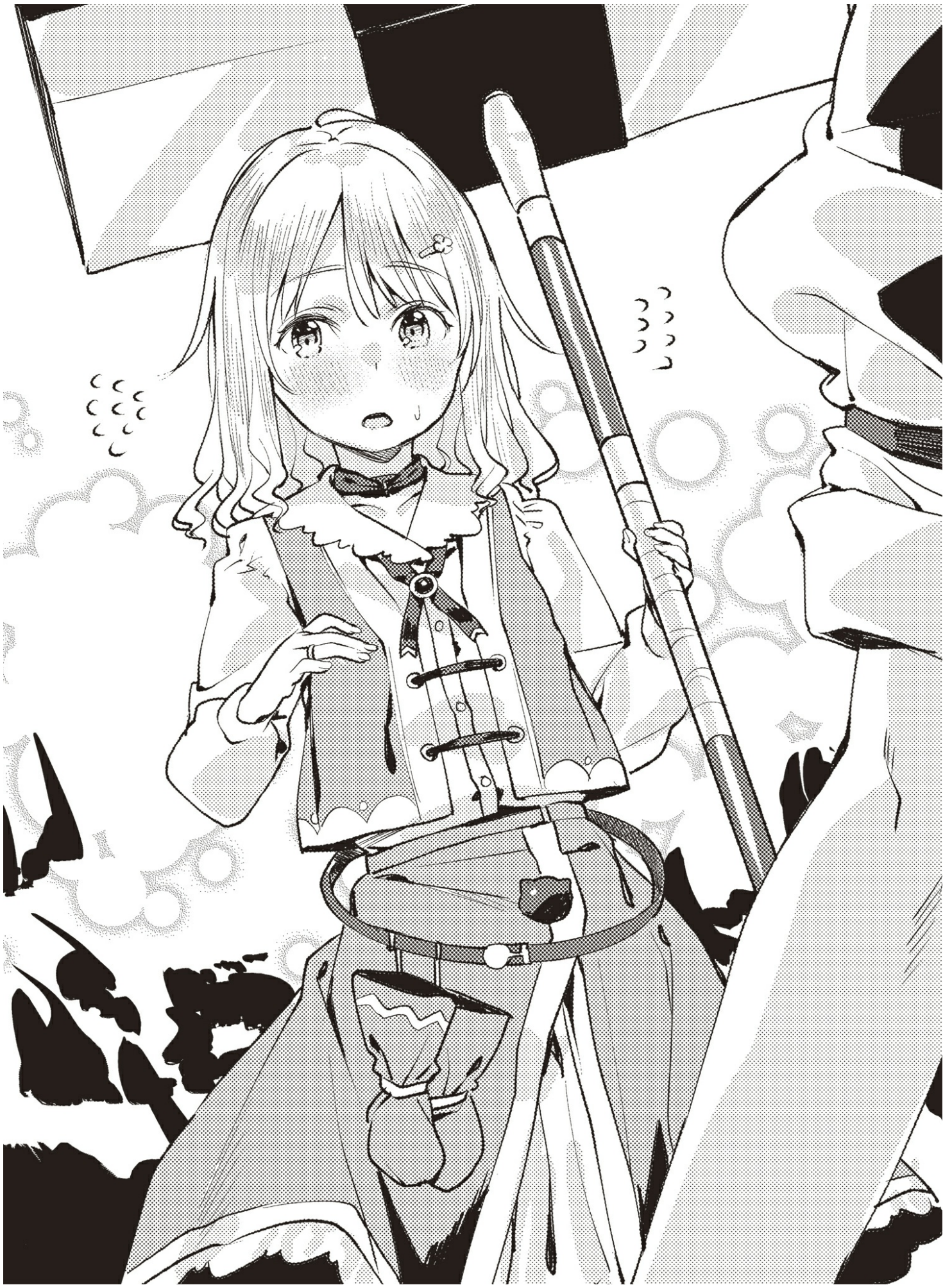
“Okay,” she agreed. “I’ll kill lots of monsters with it on my finger.”

“Good luck! I’ll cheer you on.”

Emily flashed me a smile.

After that, she broke a ridiculous number of rocks and we obtained tons of dandelions.

On that day, we earned 12,000 piro. That amount being more than double yesterday’s 5,000 piro was probably because Emily was in even higher spirits.



16. The Gourmand's Request

That night, after we returned from Arsenic, Emily and I went to a tavern. It was a joint named Villa di H that mainly served beer. However, what made it exciting was that it had ten different kinds of beer each day.

Because everything in this world came from dungeon drops, the quality and quantity of goods was dependent on the adventurers who produced them. This tavern specialized in beer, gathering and serving classy beers from ten different places every single day. And here we were, celebrating.

"I propose a toast to Emily, who brought in more than 10,000 piro in one day! Cheers."

"Ch-Cheers," Emily bashfully said as she raised her glass. It seemed she wasn't used to being celebrated. "It's...rather strange."

"Hmm?"

"I never saw myself as the sort of person who would drink beer at a tavern," she explained.

"When you make 10,000 piro in a day, you can afford little luxuries like this."

This world's common currency, the piro, was about as valuable as yen. A pack of bean sprouts was about 30 piro at the store, while three carrots were about 100 piro. Our beer was a little expensive at 500 piro a pop, but that was what you expected from a specialty tavern. Given those prices, 10,000 piro a day was certainly enough to live an average life.

"I couldn't have imagined a life like this until just recently."

“You said you dreamed of living in a house someday, right?” I asked.

“I-I never said that...” she protested, sipping at her drink to hide her mouth. Either because of the beer or out of embarrassment, Emily had flushed bright red. I teased her as we downed our drinks.

It had been so long since I’d last experienced a cheerful round of drinks to finish off a day’s work.

Suddenly, I overheard a conversation from two tables over.

“Excuse me? Are you Elliott?”

“Bwah? Yeah, I am. Who wants to know?”

“I’m a huge fan, Elliott! We’ve looked up to Elliott of Boron for so long! Our goal is to be just like you!”

“Heh. Good luck with that.”

While the man apparently named Elliot drank with his friends, another younger man had come over and introduced himself, bowing like a madman all the while. In the end, he had managed to get a handshake from Elliott.

“He famous?” I asked.

“Yes, he famous,” Emily promptly replied. I looked over to her and asked her to elaborate with my eyes.

“Boron...is the name of a dungeon,” she explained to me. “Elliott of Boron is a famous adventurer. He’s level forty-nine and has A-rank plant drops.”

“Wow.”

A-rank drops, huh? And he’s a high level, too.

The higher your level, the deeper you could go into dungeons. The higher

your drop rates, the more and better items you could produce. Emily's maximum level was 40. Given that Elliot's maximum must have been at least level 49, it was clear that he was a big deal.

"He's the only one who can produce the matsutake mushrooms on B37 of Boron. I hear he often gets requests to farm them in particular."

"That's awesome. He gets personal requests instead of just having to farm and sell them, huh?"

I honestly thought that was pretty cool.

Satisfied to have greeted his idol, the young man returned to his own seat further away. He was showing his hand to some others—probably his own friends—and bragging.

"Hey, Acro. Go tell them we're paying that table's check," Elliott demanded of his...friend? Lackey?

"Gotcha!" the man named Acro exclaimed before he jumped out of his seat, spoke to someone at the counter, and returned. "I told 'em what's up."

"Cool."

What a cool guy. Strong, famous, brave... Yeah, talk about awesome.

I wanted to be like him. As I admired him, Elliott slowly stood up. Ignoring his confused friends, he walked directly toward the tavern door and struck up a conversation with a well-built, yet refined-looking man.

"If it isn't Eric!" Elliott greeted him. "What brings a man like you here?"

"Heyo, Elliott. You've become a hell of a big shot lately, eh? I hear a lot about you."

"Heh, I wouldn't go that far. I've been holed up in Boron these days, so I

figure I should strike new ground.”

Eavesdropping, I asked Emily, “Who’s that?”

“Sorry. I don’t know.”

It seemed Emily didn’t know anything about this man named Eric.

As I gawked, I learned a few things.

“He might be a former employer,” I muttered. “Or something close, at least.”

“How can you tell?”

“Well, there’s a clear power dynamic at play. They’re using casual language, but Elliott rose to meet Eric. When his fan came to his table, he didn’t so much as glance up.”

“Oh! I see.”

“And again, though his language is casual, he’s being oddly courteous. If he’s not an employer, he must at least be a major client.”

“It’s incredible that you can perceive so much simply by watching them,” Emily said, complimenting me.

“I’m just speculating here. But just so you know, not being able to read power dynamics when you have several contacts in one place can be fatal,” I explained as I remembered my past a little.

While Emily and I conversed, Elliott returned to his own seat. Eric then went to the counter and began chatting up the owner. It seemed their conversation was over, so I stopped watching and looked back at Emily.

“Back to Arsenic tomorrow, right?” I asked.

“I was thinking of going back there, yes.”

“You’ve grown stronger and you have the ring, so you might not need to go to Tellurium anymore. Maybe people will start calling you Emily of Arsenic someday.”

“Th-That would be rather embarrassing...”

“Sounds pretty cool to me.”

I was half-teasing, but also half-serious. I lifted my cup and held it out, waiting for Emily to raise hers for a toast. But then, I heard a voice behind me.

“I presume...you are Sir Sato?”

“Huh?” Emily mumbled, clearly surprised.

I turned around and saw that the well-built man named Eric was there. He was gazing at me. I mean, he had literally addressed me by name, so that wasn’t odd at all, but still...

It was uncomfortable to have gathered the entire tavern’s attention—especially Elliott’s—but I managed to urge him to sit.



Eric introduced himself as a simple gourmet, but I doubted that was all there was to him. Your bearing naturally revealed your lot in life. He wasn’t hiding it or trying to show off; he simply exuded the air of a man with a good upbringing.

Eric explained that he had heard about me from Swallow’s Returned Favor and had come to see for himself.

“Have you visited B4 of Tellurium?” he asked me.

“The fourth? No, not yet.”

Between Emily’s fear of cockro slimes and the things I had learned about outsiders, I hadn’t had time to venture beyond the third floor.

“Oh, I see. Well, B4 of Tellurium is home to bat slimes who drop bamboo shoots. It is the only floor in all of Cyclo where one can find them, in fact.”

“Very enlightening,” I replied.

“I took the liberty of sampling one of your carrots,” Eric continued. “It was beyond delicious. So delicious, in fact, that I cursed myself for not having met you sooner.”

Is he exaggerating?

“So...you want me to get you some bamboo shoots?” I asked, figuring the conversation seemed to be heading in that direction.

Eric returned a silent nod. His expression remained serene, but his eyes sparkled like those of a child excited about something. Though it was our first time meeting, his eyes made it all too clear that he truly loved to eat delicious food.

“Very well, then,” I answered. “I’ll do just that.”

“Oooh! Your help is much appreciated!”

As such, I received my very first personal request. It was time to conquer B4 of Tellurium.

17. Ryota Brand

I arrived at Nihonium to stock up on freeze rounds in preparation for my first attempt at B4 of Tellurium. I didn't know what I'd find, so I wanted to be prepared.

"Oh?"

I could hear some people walking through Nihonium, the dungeon that was deserted due to having no drops. They sounded like a boisterous gang. As soon as I stepped onto B1, I quickly encountered the source of the noise.

What a strange group. Five men, one woman. One middle-aged man was barking out orders like a foreman, while the other four were like gofers. As for the one woman... Well, she was clearly young. A child, perhaps? She looked like a delicate princess, except she wore snow-white armor. She had a longsword at her hip, too, but she was so slender that I wasn't sure she could actually swing it properly.

The foreman spotted me and gruffly asked, "Hmm? Who are you?"

"Uh, hey. I'm the guy who's been farming here every day."

"Farming here? You're a weird one."

"Well, what are *you* doing here?" I shot back. "If you think I'm weird, then you must know this place doesn't have any drops, right?"

"That's why we're here," the man said, curling his lips into a smirk.

Uh, what? What does that mean?

I was confused, but my questions were promptly answered. A skeleton had appeared. The four gofers fell upon it and attacked.

Do they really need four people to kill it? I wondered. However, the four of them were clearly holding back in an effort to weaken it rather than kill it.

Eventually, the skeleton could hardly move anymore. It was the girl's turn to act. She sluggishly raised her longsword—exactly as weakly as I'd expected—and dealt a blow. The skeleton then fell and stopped moving.

I see. So they weaken the skeleton for her to finish it off.

That was a common sight in games, too. Strong people weakened the monsters, and then the weak ones dealt finishing blows so that they could get easy EXP. Actually, I had done the same for Emily.

However, it seemed that wasn't *quite* their goal. After the skeleton was defeated, the men rushed to stuff it into a box. It was a sturdy box that appeared to be made to seal and preserve the contents. Once the skeleton was inside, they sealed it tight. Then, I heard the usual *pop*. That was the sound of a monster disappearing and dropping an item. Nihonium didn't have drops for anyone but me, and yet I heard the noise.

The skeleton had died inside the box.

"There!" the foreman stated proudly. "That oughta do it."

"Er, what was that?"

"It's an air box."

"Air...box?"

"You know the monsters here only drop air, right?"

"Huh? Uh, yeah, I guess so."

I had thought of them as “not having drops” for others, but Emily had mentioned at one point that when monsters didn’t drop anything, they were actually dropping air or water.

“Here in Nihonium, they don’t even drop water,” he said. “It’s air all the way down.”

“I see.”

“These are Princess Margaret’s Special-Made Air Boxes! They’re full of air from monsters the princess beats. Would you believe they’re our top-selling product?!”

“Air?! You can sell *air*?!”

“You can sell air *made by a princess*! That’s all it takes to sell air.”

“...”

I was shook. I had learned far more than I’d ever wanted to.



After obtaining a freeze round from B1 of Nihonium, I went to Tellurium’s fourth. I had to go through the cockro slime nest that was on B3, so I left Emily behind and ventured there alone.

Now, what are these bat slimes like?

My question was soon answered. The audible flapping of wings heralded the arrival of a deep-blue slime with bat-like wings and a mischievous-looking set of fangs. As the name implied, it was a slime with bat features.

It flew directly toward me. I'd expected a headbutt, but it opened its mouth wide to reveal sharp fangs. Was it going to bite me? Or suck my blood, perhaps? I wasn't sure which, but either one sounded bad, so I evaded the attack.

Once it had slowed down, I fired a round at it, which struck it directly in the center. Did that count as a headshot or a bodyshot? Either way, the slime fell to the floor and disappeared with a pop.

A bamboo shoot came out. It was nice, plump, and heavy. A delicious bamboo shoot, indeed. This was the fourth-floor product, the item that Eric had asked me to procure. I picked it up and continued through the dungeon.

Once I had farmed a good number, I made my way back outside.



I returned to the tavern from yesterday. It *was* still midday, so there weren't any customers there. An employee was in the middle of preparing to open, changing out the menu. Part of me wanted to stop by again that night, drawn by the intrigue of new varieties of beer.

Meanwhile, Eric gazed at one of the bamboo shoots I had brought him.

"Hrm... These are your bamboo shoots?" he said as he stared and sniffed at it. "Th-This is..."

"Is something wrong?" I asked, a little concerned.

"Excuse me for a moment," Eric said as he pulled a knife from his pocket. It was small, but well-maintained. I could tell it was a good, sharp knife. And honestly, Eric's skills were just as sharp. He used the knife to dexterously peel

away the bamboo shoot's skin and slice the inside. These were the fascinating motions of a first-class chef. Given his build and gentlemanly nature, I hadn't thought that this gourmand would cook for himself, so it was a little surprising.

Incredibly, he ate the bamboo shoot on the spot.

He ate it raw?!

While I was surprised, Eric was enraptured.

"Oooh... The plumpness and sweetness of it! And despite it being raw, there's not even a hint of bitterness! I've never had such an exquisite bamboo shoot," he said, praising the bamboo shoot with exaggerated language.

Yeah, this man's definitely a gourmand. It seems like he's a fan, though!



Once the tavern Villa di H had opened for the day, I met up with Emily and enjoyed a second consecutive evening of after-work celebration.

"I take it he was satisfied?" she asked.

"Yeah. Though, he only gave me 20,000 piro, so I was left feeling a little disappointed."

"How many bamboo shoots did you give him?"

"Ten. I guess that's not bad per unit, right?"

2,000 piro per bamboo shoot. That was akin to what they'd cost at a high-class grocer, but I'd honestly expected a little better than that given Eric's attire and bearing. Still, it was no skin off my back.

“By the way, I saw these ‘air boxes’ today,” I said.

“What are ‘air boxes’?” Emily asked in turn.

“Boxes of air. I mean, I guess they’re brand-name products?”

I continued to enjoy my beer as I explained what had happened in Nihonium earlier. Today’s beer was from B30 of Beryllium, the most distant of all dungeons this tavern had contact with. It was reminiscent of a craft stout due to its bitter, chocolatey taste.

It was delicious, in my opinion. Just as I was about to raise my hand and ask a waiter for another glass, I spotted Erza coming through the entrance. She looked around as if searching for something. And for whatever reason, that something turned out to be me.

“Oh! Ryota!” she exclaimed as she jogged directly over to our table.

“What brings you here?” I asked.

“I’ve heard the news. Please, sign a contract with us!”

“Wait, wait, slow down. What’s this about a contract?”

“We want your Ryota Bamboo Shoots!”

“Ryota...Bamboo Shoots?”

Am I being pranked? If she wants bamboo shoots, it must be related to Eric, but...

“Rumors about the bamboo shoots beloved by Eric Macy himself are quickly spreading through Cyclo!”

“Rumors?!”

“We want your bamboo shoots, Ryota,” Erza begged. “And we want the right

to use your name on them. Of course, I swear we'll give you a good deal. Please!"

Confused though I was, Erza's desperation overwhelmed me into agreeing to her demands. As such, with Eric's seal of approval, Ryota-brand bamboo shoots became a popular product. In the process, I was blessed with an even more stable source of high income.

18. What Goes Around Comes Around

One morning, in the home that Emily had made so warm and comfortable, I found myself deep in thought. I had laid out our funds atop the table. We had 495,000 piro, and that was everything I had saved so far.

“What’s the matter, Yoda?” Emily asked. “You’re just staring at money.”

“We’ve got some savings now, so I’m wondering which we should spend it on.”

“Which? Have you settled on options?”

I nodded. Emily had guessed correctly.

“I’m stuck between buying a magic cart—even a used one—or moving,” I said.

“Moving?”

“We’ve gotten used to living here, but it’s *really* cramped. We’re spending 20,000 piro a month on an old apartment that’s the size of a shoebox.”

“I don’t particularly—”

“We *definitely* need two rooms, I think.”

“Two?”

“Yeah...?”

Emily looked surprised.

I wonder why?

“Maybe even three,” I added. “You have a lot of luggage, so that might be

better.”

“Oh... Then we’re going to move out together...” she said, looking strangely happy.

What’s her deal? Well, leaving that aside...

“I was also wondering what we should do about a magic cart. Given our funds, I doubt we can do both. We’ll need a deposit and key money if we want to move, after all, and the moving itself—”

“Leave the moving to me!” Emily exclaimed, pumping her fists. She was more than happy to take care of the work that required muscle. It was adorable to see such a short girl pumping her fists, but the thing was, I really could leave all the hard labor to her without issue.

Anyway, leaving that aside once again...

“I’m still not sure which one is the right choice. Emily, what do you think?”

“I vote for the magic cart. It will make work more efficient. Plus, if we plan to do both, getting the cart first will help us reach that goal faster.”

“Very true,” I agreed. “All right, let’s buy the cart first.”

“Okay!”



Emily and I went straight into the city to buy a magic cart.

We had almost 500,000 piro on hand. Magic cart prices were similar to those of cars, so we would only be able to buy a used one with that much. I asked Erza

for her thoughts and she directed us to a used cart shop named Progress.

Magic carts were lined up out front. There were so many different varieties that I could tell we were in for a treat. Thus, we went into the shop. The person running the place was a youthful man in his early twenties.

“Old man, what the hell are you doing...?” The shopkeeper looked worried as he mumbled to himself. What was going on here? When he noticed us, he seemed to compose himself and flashed a jovial smile. “Oh, customers? Sorry. Step right in. Are you looking for a magic cart? We have all sorts of normal and custom carts—”

I interrupted his sales talk and asked, “What’s the matter?”

He stared at me, eyes wide in surprise.

“Yoda?”

“Sorry,” I apologized to Emily. “This might be a bit of a detour.”

“It’s okay!” she assured me with a smile.

I looked back at the young man and said, “It seemed like you were having some trouble. Wanna talk about it?”

He stared back at me in silence. His sales façade began to collapse into a worried furrow of the brow—until it looked like he was about to cry. Shortly thereafter, he spoke up with desperation in his voice.

“Well...my dad’s been missing for three days now.”

“Whaaat?! That’s awful!” Emily bellowed, sympathizing with his plight.

“Maybe now isn’t the time to be running the shop?” I suggested.

“I *do* have an idea where he went, so I thought it would be fine...but he’s been gone for three whole days. But y’know, *I* can’t exactly go look for him.”

“Where has he gone?”

“The dungeon Arsenic. It’s full of rocks that don’t move, so I doubt he was attacked, but...”

I’m still worried, his expression seemed to say.

Emily and I locked eyes and nodded.

“What is his name?” Emily asked.

“What does he look like?” I added.

“Huh? Y-You don’t mean...”

The young employee looked as though he had seen the Messiah.



That brought us to B10 of Arsenic. Emily and I beelined down and down through the dungeon—which was easy, since the monsters were all immobile.

Like the upper floors, B10 was full of rocks that had faces, but didn’t move.

“Heavy rocks,” Emily said. “They’re the heaviest monsters in Arsenic. Accidentally turning one into an outsider can cause it to crush anything under it, so they have to be handled with utmost caution.”

“Wow.”

So they keep an eye out for stuff like that?

Since Arsenic’s monsters didn’t move, I’d thought they would be harmless as outsiders. But it made sense; if a flower suddenly turned into a heavy rock, that could cause issues.

“Huh? There’s one up above us,” I pointed out.

“That’s a light rock. It’s a B10 monster and the lightest of Arsenic’s monsters. They’re rare.”

“The lightest...? Now that you mention it, it’s floating like a balloon.”

Wow. So the tenth floor is one of those oddball floors, huh?

Thus, we searched for the young man’s father. It didn’t take long to find him, though. Going over the features his son had described, I knew the man was in his forties, short and stout, with a luxurious beard. In a word, we’d been given the description of a fantasy-world dwarf. Did dwarves exist in this world? Were they different from the dwarves I knew? As uncertainty reared its ugly head in my mind, I was happy to learn that he looked just like a classic fantasy-world dwarf.

We found him snoozing, surrounded by rocks, right in the middle of the cave.

“...”

“...”

“...”

“...”

“Emily.”

“Yes?”

“Go kick him in the head.”

“Okay!” Emily exclaimed as she jogged over and gave him a swift kick.

The man was blown away, dragging some heavy rocks with him in the process. He eventually stood up, holding his head and groaning, “Oof, ouch...”

What'd ya go and do that for?"

"Excuse us," I said. "Are you Orton?"

"Hmm? Yeah, that's me. Whaddya want?"

"Your son's been worried sick."

"Chuck? I left him a note sayin' I'd be here!"

"He hasn't heard from you in three days. Of course he's worried."

"Three days? Hoo, boy, it's been three days already? I got so focused that I totally lost track o' time."

"..."

"Yoda, I'm fighting the urge to kick him again," Emily said.

"Try to bear it. I know *exactly* how you feel."

"Right."

At least we've confirmed Orton is safe, I guess.

Next, we'd have to return to the magic cart shop and report to his son, Chuck. With that, I turned to leave, but...

"Mr. Orton, what are you doing here?" Emily asked.

"I came to gather materials for remodeling magic carts. You know we sell carts, don'tcha?"

Remodeled carts...? Chuck did say something about that, didn't he?

"Do you remodel them yourself?"

"Yep. Messing with carts is what I live for. I thought of an awesome new feature three days back, so I came to gather materials for it."

“Right...” Emily mumbled, pondering his words all the while. “But aren’t all of Arsenic’s drops flowers?”

“Hehehehe... Who said I was using the drops?”

“Huh?”

“I use the monsters!”

“The monsters?” I raised an eyebrow. “But don’t the monsters become outsiders when— *Oh!*”

“There ya go,” Orton confirmed. “Arsenic’s monsters are unmoving rocks. Even if they’re outsiders, they can’t do much o’ anythin’.”

“Wowww!”

I was pretty impressed. Interested, too. Orton was using monsters—outsiders, at that—in a clever way. I was curious to see how he could remodel a cart with them.

“I can’t find a single rare light rock, though,” he added as he kicked the pile of heavy rocks at his feet. “I need one heavy and one light, but I haven’t seen a light rock in days.”

“We actually saw one on our way here.”

“Really?! Where?!” Orton exclaimed, leaning so far forward that I got an extreme close-up of his face. Yeah, he was excited.



We left Arsenic and the city proper and eventually arrived at an empty field.

There, we placed two flowers atop the ground. They were both roses: one red, the other blue.

Once we'd placed them on the ground, the three of us stepped away. We made enough distance so that we could barely see them, and then we waited for them to become outsiders.

Before long, the two roses became monsters again: a heavy rock and a light rock.

"Yeeeah, that'll do it– Oh no!" Orton exclaimed as he dashed madly for the rocks.

The heavy rock remained on the ground, but the light rock had already begun floating away. The first balloon-like light rock we'd discovered had been stuck to the ceiling of the dungeon; this one was now flying off into the sky.

Orton sprinted over and leaped for it, but his short, stout, dwarf-like body could not reach it. Emily, on the other hand, ran after it and jumped, hitting it with her hammer as soon as she was high enough. Despite it being as hard as a rock, it maintained its balloon-like characteristics. Thus, even the faintest of blows caused it to float even further away.

"Agh, aww..." Orton wailed as he watched the light rock drift away into the sky.

"All good," I consoled them.

"What will you do, Yoda?"

"This. It's a good thing I saved a round," I said as I pulled out my revolver and loaded the freeze round I had retrieved after seeing Princess Margaret's boxed air.

I aimed at the light rock and fired. It was a direct hit, freezing the outsider.

The balloon became a giant hunk of ice and succumbed to the force of gravity, falling to the ground.

“Incredible, Yoda!”

“Not bad, son!”

They were amazed. Though, honestly, I was just glad that we didn’t end up having to waste a rare monster.



Having returned to Progress, Orton ignored his son’s worries and holed up in the back of the shop. His son, Chuck, let out an exasperated yet resigned chuckle and said, “He’s always like that.”

Though he complained, Chuck’s expression betrayed a hint of relief. Orton hadn’t ever actually been in any danger, but we were glad to assuage his worries. Emily and I shared a furtive high-five, happy to have helped. Now we could get to choosing a magic cart—or so we thought.

But just then, Orton emerged from the back, pushing a cart.

“All done, kids!”

“That was fast!” Emily mused.

“Yeah, happened in the blink of an eye,” I agreed.

“It was already nearly done. Just had to slot these boys in.”

He had affixed one heavy rock and one light rock to the cart he was pushing. The heavy rock was positioned to not crush anything, while the light rock was

positioned to not fly off. They were fixed in place, it seemed.

“Is this a remodeled cart?” I asked.

“Yep. See these two buns here?”

“Dad!” Chuck shouted. “That’s my lunch!”

“You set their value, toss ’em in...” Orton trailed off as he operated a panel on the cart and put one bun inside. It was a 150-piro sweet bun. These were apparently dropped in dungeons as well. After putting it inside, the panel above the two monsters displayed a number: 150.

“Put another in, and you get this,” he continued as he placed the second bun inside. This time, it said 300. “When you put stuff inside, it calculates the weight and spits out the value.”

“Oooh, now that’s convenient,” I said, amazed by his invention. I would have loved to be able to know how much I was earning at a glance while farming in dungeons.

So it takes one heavy rock and one light rock to be able to measure weight, huh?

I didn’t know how it worked, but oddly enough, that made perfect sense.

“You can have it,” Orton declared.

“Huh?”

“Consider it my thanks for helping me out. Oh, and for coming to find me.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah! Later,” Orton said before holing himself up in the back of the shop once again. On his way out, I heard him say, “Now, what do I make next?”

It seemed he loved creating and cared little about anything else.

“Umm...” Emily and I mumbled as we looked at Chuck awkwardly.

“All yours,” he said. “He’s always like this. Besides, I never got a chance to thank you.”

“Okay... Well, we appreciate it.”

Thus, we received a custom cart and got to keep all of our money.

This means we have a cart AND can move to a bigger place!

19. The Man Who Made 300,000 Piro in a Day

I took the next day off from raising my stats in Nihonium and went to Tellurium early instead. My goal was to test out the magic cart's functions. How much could I fit inside it? How much money would I make? Those were the main questions on my mind.

I started on B1, hunting regular slimes that dropped bean sprouts. They were weak, so I tried to stop using my gun.

However, that method was clearly inefficient. I had to find them, approach, and punch them. The effort required to approach them, let alone to follow them when they inevitably moved, meant that a close-range battle was ponderous. Thus, I portioned my bullets and shot them on sight. With each defeated slime, I tossed bean sprouts into the cart.

I continued until the cart finally alerted me that it was at maximum capacity. Since it was full, I tried using Orton's custom function. After I inputted the value of a single bean sprout, it revealed a total number.

47,189 piro. It was over 40,000 now! I was shocked. Thus far, I only would have earned 20,000 piro per round trip. My revenue had doubled just like that! The sheer awesomeness of it all excited me.

I converted 1,789 piro's worth of bean sprouts into outsiders to replenish my ammunition and took the rest to Erza.

"Exactly forty thousand! How?!" Erza asked, clearly stunned.

She was even more amazed when I explained that it was a feature of my cart.

Adventurers listening in commented that they wanted one, too, so I directed them to Orton's shop.

With my 40,000 piro profit, I returned to Tellurium and descended to B2. It was time to fight sleep slimes for their carrot drops.

First, I set the sale price of a carrot on the cart. When I encountered a sleep slime, I took it down in a single shot and placed the carrot in my magic cart, which displayed 34 piro.

Another slime, another kill, another carrot in the cart. It went from 34 piro to 63 piro. When I defeated the next one, I received a rather large carrot, bringing me to 101 piro.

Instead of calculating it all at once, like with the bean sprouts, I put in the value at the start and watched it rise. It was exciting to see the numbers go up with each carrot.

Eventually, the cart was full again. The final displayed price was 38,814 piro. A little lower than a full cart of bean sprouts, but still about double what I'd made before having the cart! I used 814 piro's worth to make more bullets, leaving me with 38,000 piro of revenue.

Next came the pumpkins from the third floor's cockro slimes. Like I'd done with the carrots, I set the value ahead of time. I defeated a cockro slime, and out popped an enormous pumpkin. Then, I put it in the magic cart, which displayed a shocking 10,016.

Just one took me over ten thousand?!

It was exciting in a totally different way than last time. Putting in just one at a time made the value skyrocket. However, I could only fit four pumpkins in the magic cart. And due to their differences in size, four ended up being 39,608

piro—just short of 40 grand.

I had only used four bullets, so I didn't bother replenishing them.

At this rate, it seemed like bean sprouts were the way to go. I could really pack them in, unlike pumpkins and carrots. Was that what had made the difference?

Meanwhile, the pumpkins were probably the worst for this strategy. The cheapest of the four went for about 8,000 piro, but it was still too big to fit five pumpkins of its size into the cart. Four was the absolute limit. That could lead to my worst run being 32,000 piro—which, to be fair, was still overwhelmingly efficient compared to before.

I sold off my pumpkins in full and decided to end the day with a run through B4 of Tellurium.

Monster: bat slimes. Drop: bamboo shoots.

Though, I wasn't quite sure what to set the unit price at.

Aw, to hell with it. It's the last one of the day, so let's go out with a bang.

I thus entered the unit price of Ryota Bamboo Shoots. Then, I shot a bat slime and received a branded bamboo shoot. While I was at it, I decided not to check their value as I went. Instead, I'd look once I had finished filling the cart.

Kill slime, insert bamboo shoot.

Kill slime, try desperately not to look at the number, insert bamboo shoot.

I single-mindedly slaughtered bat slimes and collected their drops until the cart finally alerted me that it was full.

It's full! Now let's see the total!

I was excited and nervous at the same time. For some reason, I closed one

eye as I slooowly turned to see the number.

211,740.

Huh? Umm, ones, tens, hundreds, thousands, ten thousands... That's two 1s in a row there, right? I'm not just seeing things, right? That is...six digits there, right? Yes? Six digits?! 200,000 piro?!

Had I earned 200,000 piro from bamboo shoots alone? Thanks to Eric, my bamboo shoots had been branded and sold for a high price, but...200,000? That was ten times the usual amount!

The cart doubled my efficiency, so even without it, I'd have been able to make 100,000 piro per trip.

Incredible...

On that day, in Tellurium, I learned about the raw power of both the magic cart and the Ryota Bamboo Shoots.

Forty thousand, forty thousand, forty thousand, and two hundred thousand... That's about 320,000 piro!

As I returned home in high spirits, I realized that in one day I had made what I used to make in a month of working from sunrise to sunset. That fact only excited me more.

20. Lounging It Up in Our New Home

The next morning, Emily and I took the whole day off work. We avoided dungeons entirely and went out into the city. Our destination was the real estate broker who had helped me when I rented out the first apartment for Emily.

When he saw me, he stood up and greeted me, saying, “Oh? Mr. Sato, I believe? What brings you here today?”

He was a gentle-mannered man in his early thirties. The guy was really slender. If you wanted to be mean, you might say he was so lanky that he would be knocked over by a stiff breeze. However, he sounded rather confident when he spoke, so he didn’t strike me as unreliable at all.

Err, what’s his name, again? Umm...

“My name is Antonio,” he added with a smile. Realizing I couldn’t remember his name, he’d offered it up before I even asked. I appreciated that.

Antonio took us to a table, where Emily and I sat across from him.

“We’d like to rent a new apartment,” I explained.

“Thank you for coming to me. What do you have in mind?”

“Something new and spacious.”

“Understood. Where would you place your budget?”

“Up to 800,000 piro, including fees and the like.”

“Yoda?!” Emily piped up in surprise after being totally silent to that point.

“800,000 piro is all the money you’ve saved! Are you sure? I think we should keep just a little bit...”

“It’s fine.”

If I didn’t have money, I could just make more. I had S-rank drops, increased HP and strength that made it easy to kill monsters, and increased farming efficiency through the magic cart. Using all of my money today would not trouble me in the slightest. I could make a significant portion of it back tomorrow, after all.

The confidence that I could make money tomorrow made me more willing to spend lavishly today.

“Understood,” Antonio said. “Then...how do you feel about a place like this?”



We readily agreed to rent the apartment. It was a two-bedroom in the center of the city—newly constructed, clean, and guaranteed good neighbors.

Rent was 150,000 piro a month. That was only half of what I had made using the magic cart yesterday! We could move in right away, so we agreed on the spot, paid the deposit, key money, and first month’s rent ahead of time, then signed the contract.

By the way, I decided to keep renting the old 20,000-per-month room from before. It could be left as a secondary home for as long as we needed it, and I wanted to preserve the warm home that Emily had fixed up for us.

That was a little wasteful, perhaps, but it was cheap enough, so I was fine

with it.



The next day was our first day in our new home. I woke up and went to our clean living room...where I ate a lovely breakfast prepared by Emily.

“Man, you sure are incredible, Emily.”

“How so?”

“We just moved in yesterday, y’know?”

“Yes?”

“And yet...”

I surveyed the living room. The place was spotless, and not just because it was a new building. It had the cleanliness of a new building, sure, but it also had the warmth of a lived-in home.

It definitely wasn’t like this when we first moved in yesterday. Sure, it was clean, shiny, and new when we first saw it, but that was *all* it was. I’d have been crazy if I *wasn’t* impressed.

“I just cleaned up a little,” Emily said.

“‘A little’ doesn’t even begin to cut it...”

I admired her work. As the kind of guy who often neglected this stuff, I could only admire someone who could make a new home feel so warm. Emily was incredible for her ability to do so. She gave our home more familial warmth than any other I’d known.

“Here’s your lunch. Will you begin with Nihonium and end with Tellurium again today, Yoda?” Emily asked as she handed me a small package.

I accepted it. It was a box full of handmade food. Emily’s handmade lunch would be delicious. She made food that would be good even when it was cold and consumed inside a dungeon, which was proof of her skill.

Taking a break in a dungeon and enjoying an Emily-made meal was pure bliss. However...

“I’m not going today,” I replied.

“Why not?”

I had found greater happiness—happiness that I was willing to waste a day to savor.

“I wanna hang out around the apartment today. No work for me.”

“A-Are you sure? We can’t make money unless we go to dungeons.”

“It’s fine. I’ll do it tomorrow. Besides...”

“Hmm?”

“I’ve just realized that working every single day is stupid.”

“Whaaat?! C-Can you go without working every day?”

“I think I can!” I declared confidently.

Yeah. I think I can.

I didn’t need to work every single day, since I could go out to dungeons whenever I felt like it and make all the money I needed. So in that case, what exactly was wrong with spending a lazy day inside once in a while?!

I want to be lazy! I want to laze about in this perfect environment that Emily

has created!

Emily was flustered, confused by the idea of not working.

“Emily.”

“Yes?”

“Let’s rest as hard as we can today!”

“O-Okay!”

Perhaps a little steamrolled by my enthusiasm, Emily joined me in taking the day off. We spent the day relaxing. Together, we just...hung out all day. When Eve visited to demand a carrot, I gave her an extra I’d kept just for her. She hung out with us, too.

As such, a whole day passed, I made zero money...and I didn’t suffer one bit because of it!

21. Not an Accident

In the morning, I went out to work.

On B2 of Nihonium, I killed zombies for seeds and raised my strength to S. Now I had an S in both HP and strength, so I was all done with that floor. Tomorrow, I would start on the third.

First skeletons, then zombies. What'll I find next?

I fantasized about my new findings as I left Nihonium.



I arrived at Swallow's Returned Favor, my magic cart filled to the brim with bean sprouts. I pushed it inside and stepped in to search for an employee. Erza was there, but she was helping another customer. We locked eyes, but she simply frowned apologetically. I waved and mouthed the words "see you later" to her before heading to an open counter.

"Welcome!" the woman there said, greeting me. "Oh, is that you, Mr. Sato?"

"Heya. You're Erza's friend, right? Err..."

"Ina Mistral. Erza's... Oh. She's busy, huh?"

"Not a problem. I'll be back later. Anyway, I'd like to sell these bean sprouts."

"Okay, I'll calculate what we owe you right now— Huh?" Erza's friend, Ina, was surprised. "It's exactly 40,000 piro."

“Yeah. I brought exactly enough for that.”

Thanks to the magic cart’s new feature and the ease with which I could calibrate bean sprout weight, I could bring exact amounts. Of course, I had used the leftover amount to create outsiders to generate bullets.

“I figure it’s easier for you if there’s no change involved,” I added.

“Well, yes,” Ina mumbled as she stared at me. What did she want? “How considerate... I can see why Erza fell for you.”

“Huh? What was that?”

“Oh, nothing... Anyway, thank you for making it so easy to calculate. Here’s your 40,000 piro.”

“Thanks.”

“Please come again,” Ina said, ending our deal.

And so, I turned the magic cart around and moved to push it outside.

Might as well go farm carrots in Tellu—

“You think this is funny?!”

A man’s brazen yell echoed through the shop. It was followed by the sound of something hitting something else.

Boom!

The shop, loud and lively with adventurers selling things, suddenly went quiet. Curious, I stopped and turned toward the source of the voice. A man was slamming his fists onto Erza’s counter, which was half-destroyed by now.

She quivered, her face pale, as she mumbled, “B-But sir, the calculator—”

Boom!

This time, he had stomped on the floor. The impact shook the building. I could've sworn that I'd heard the walls creak, even.

"9,000 piro?!" he roared. "That doesn't make any sense. I know I brought more than ten thousand. Does this place always steal from their customers?!"

Of course they weren't stealing. I had brought exactly 40,000 piro worth in. Ina was surprised by the exactness of it before I explained myself. Besides, nobody in this business would risk ruining their reputation by swindling someone out of just 1,000 piro. It made no sense.

"What are you gonna do about this, huh?!"

"I-I'm sorry!"

"Don't just apologize to me—" he exclaimed as he raised his fist and reached out to punch Erza. All the onlookers collectively gasped.

Bang! Crack!

The man's arm froze! In that instant, I had loaded and fired a freeze round at him, causing his whole torso to freeze.

"The hell is this?!" he demanded.

"Did nobody teach you not to hit a woman?"

"Huh? What do you want from me?!"

"Ryota!" Erza called out my name. She had tears in her eyes, but her relief at being rescued was rather evident.

Other customers clamored.

"Hey, did you see that?!"

"He just froze up. Was that magic?"

“I didn’t hear chanting. Is it chantless?”

“Chantless magic can’t freeze a guy like that. I don’t feel any mana, either.”

“But I saw a magic circle!”

Now wasn’t the time to focus on them, though. I was ready to throw this guy out, so I confronted him.

He glared at me with bloodshot eyes, though his torso was still frozen.

“What are you trying to do here, huh?”

“I know this shop well. It’s a good place; they’d never cheat anyone out of money.”

“How would you know that?”

I brought over my magic cart and asked Erza, “What’d he sell? Are these... spring onions? What’s the unit price?”

“Um, um, uh...”

Erza finally stammered out an answer, which I inputted into the magic cart. I then loaded it with the spring onions he had brought in, putting them in one at a time. At first, nobody could tell what I was doing.

“Oh, so that’s a magic cart function!”

“It calculates the value of whatever he puts inside? That’s awfully convenient!”

“I’ve never seen one like that. Where’d he get it?”

“I hear it’s an option you can get at a shop called Progress.”

By the time the onlookers had started to figure it out, I had placed the last spring onion in my cart. The result was 9,120 piro.

I showed it to the man and said, “There you have it.”

“That thing’s junk! You just cheated me, too!”

“How would I do that with everyone watching?”

“Grrr! You don’t know when to shut up, do you?!” the man shouted, veins bulging from his temples. “Hmph!”

He flexed his arm, breaking the ice around it. That wasn’t all he did, however; his body seemed to double in size. He had some big muscles. The guy was the sort of super-muscly character you’d expect to unleash “100% of 100% of his full power.”

“I’ll show you what happens when you get in my way!” the man roared as he swung his fist.

Whoosh!

It whistled through the air, flying toward me. I held out my hand and caught the punch mid-flight. The floor cracked and crumbled a little, but I stood my ground.

“Wh-What?!”

“Hup!”

Then, I countered with a full-power right hook. The man was sent flying, bent at the waist, until he slammed into the floor. He frothed at the mouth and stopped moving, so he must’ve fainted.

“Whoa! He downed that guy in one punch.”

“So he’s not a mage?”

“That guy’s power was the real deal, but this man just beat his butt...”

I ignored the people chattering around me, since my first priority was to console Erza.



In the end, the man was arrested and dragged off by city police. I had damaged the shop somewhat by launching him away, but they actually thanked me instead of blaming me. Afterward, everyone resumed their usual buying and selling.

I went outside with Erza.

“Thank you for that,” she said.

“Don’t worry about it. I did what anyone would do.”

“Really, thank you...” Erza gazed at me with enchanted, teary eyes. I was a little uncomfortable, since people didn’t usually stare at me like that.

Unsure of what to do, I decided...to flee.

“I’m just glad you’re safe. Anyway, bye. I’ll bring carrots later.”

“Okay...”

I pushed my magic cart to leave, but suddenly, I realized that I hadn’t told her we’d moved yet.

I turned around. At the same time, she chased after me and began to speak.

“Oh, by the way, I—”

“Hey—”

We ended up bumping into each other.

Mch!

A wet sound resounded as I felt something soft and warm on my lips.

Are we...kissing?

I didn't realize it until about ten seconds had passed. Flustered, I backed away. Erza was blushing, her hands on her lips.

"S-S-S-S-Sorry! I didn't mean to—" I rushed to defend myself.

This is bad. This is really, really bad.

Who steals a kiss by accident? I was in big trouble.

"That was an accident— Agh, no excuses. I'm really sorry. I'll do anything I can do to make up—" I desperately pleaded, and yet...

Mwah!

There was that wet, warm feeling again.

"...Huh?"

It was a kiss. Erza had kissed me.

"E-Erza?"

"Not an accident," she mumbled.

"Huh?"

"I don't want you to think it was an accident."

"Th-Then..."

"I did it on purpose...because I like you," Erza said, hiding her face as she blushed even harder and running off into the shop.

I stood vacantly out front until I finally pieced together what had just

happened.



22. S vs. A

In the morning, I jogged over to the dungeon Nihonium. There was a status board at the entrance, so I decided to check out my stats.



As usual, I was stuck at level 1. However, just as my HP had reached S from grinding on B1, my strength was now S from grinding on B2. As such, I was naturally off to B3 today.

I passed right through B1 and B2, which were teeming with skeletons and zombies. The ones who broke down walls to ambush me were annoying, but I totally ignored them, and before long I reached B3. Its atmosphere was similar to that of the previous floors: a dim, humid, natural cavern.

A monster appeared in no time—a humanoid brute clad in bandages that clawed its way out of the ground. It appeared to be around the same size as a

normal human, though a bit larger. If pressed to say, I'd call it as big as a pro wrestler.

It's one of those Monster Quest mummy men, isn't it?

I had faced skeletons and zombies so far in Nihonium. It seemed each dungeon had its tendencies and its specialties. This floor was the same; another undead monster had appeared, this time a mummy.

Seeing my theories confirmed was a relief. After letting out a contented sigh, I decided to confirm something. I fired my gun at the charging mummy. Since it was so big, it was an easy target—but my first shot only caused it to totter slightly before it continued its charge.

I panicked a little and fired several times, emptying the revolver's entire cylinder into the mummy's head before it finally went flying off its shoulders. Over ten bullets later, it was dead. At this point, I'd broken out into a bit of a cold sweat, but at least the monster's drop was the same as usual.

Nihonium monsters normally didn't drop anything. Only someone with drop stats of S, like me, could receive something. And the items in question were stat-boosting seeds.

I picked up the seed, which immediately melted away in my hand.

Ryota's speed went up by 1!

This was the same, too. Another wave of relief washed over me. It seemed B3 would raise my speed. Knowing that, I excitedly searched for more mummies.

"Whoa!"

A mummy ambush! A wall collapsed, and one appeared from the wreckage to cling to me.

I struggled. Luckily, my gun happened to be pointed at its body, so I fired away.

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!

I shot plenty of bullets, but they didn't do much. Booting it forward to get it off me, I then struck it with a roundhouse kick.

The mummy bent at the waist...and split in half. It fell to the ground and dropped another seed. While picking it up, I thought for a moment. Unlike previous floors, the gun wasn't very efficient here. It seemed direct strikes with my S-rank strength were better. Perhaps the gun was better used as an emergency measure?

With that decided, I wrung my fists to steel myself and continued hunting for mummies. I ended up getting pretty tired due to the extra effort, but I succeeded in raising my speed from F to E by lunch.



Once I was back in Cyclo, I went to a place called Hollow Hollow. It was like a big public dining hall. Almost all of the customers were adventurers. And since so many adventurers gathered there, it was a lively place.

I took a seat and ordered a light meal. Emily and I had planned to meet there today. I didn't need the magic cart in the mornings when I went to Nihonium, so I'd lent it to her while she broke rocks and farmed flowers in Arsenic. You could really pack flowers in there, so I knew she'd make a lot of money.

I waited excitedly to learn just how much she'd made. After a while, a shadow fell over me. Was she here?

"Emily?" I called out. And yet, when I looked up...

"Hi there. Ryota Sato, I presume?"

It was not Emily. Instead, I was greeted by a slender man who was probably in his twenties, the kind of guy who looked like a handsome idol.

The man sat right next to me before asking, "Mind if I sit here?"

"Little weird to ask when you've already done it... I mean, there are plenty of other open seats around here."

"I have business with you. Why else do you think I said your name?"

Come to think of it, he had. I looked at him again and asked, "Who are you?"

"People I'm close to call me Nee. You're free to do so, if you'd like."

Uh, I don't know what this guy's deal is, but I'm cringing.

"Think I'll pass. Anyway, what do you want from me?"

"Fair. Y'know, you've got a rockin' bod, friend."

"Are you after my body?!" I exclaimed as I jumped out of my chair. Now I really wanted to run away.

"Hahaha, no, no! I'm not gay, if that's what you mean. People make that mistake often, but I'm as het as they get."

"G-Got proof?" I asked, but quickly realized that was an extremely rude question.

The stranger turned away and yelled, "C'mere, Lil and Ran!"

Shortly thereafter, two women approached our table.

One was a voluptuous beauty who looked a little older than the man, while the other was a cutie who seemed to be in her late teens. In other words, one was like a big sister, while the other was like a little sister.

“Aww, are you done already?”

“Do we have to leave?”

“Hahaha, no, dears. This man here thinks I play for the other team.”

“Oooh, is that all?”

Mwah!

“We know better!”

Mwah!

Lil and Ran both kissed him. They were quick kisses, but there was no doubt the three of them were romantically involved.

After proving his claim, the two women retreated to their seats.

“Those two are my partners, both officially and privately,” the man explained.

“R-Right...”

“So there you have it: I’m straight. Convinced yet?”

“Y-Yeah, I’m convinced all right.”

I was actually pissed because this guy had his own mini-harem, but it was honestly a relief as well. And so, I asked, “So, what do you need from me?”

“Well, I was hoping to touch those arms of yours,” he replied.

“You *are* after my body, then?!”

I jumped up more vigorously than last time, knocking my chair down in the process.

“Not like that. Hmm... Okay, how about this? Let’s arm-wrestle.”

“Arm-wrestle? Why?”

“I heard a certain rumor yesterday. Apparently, you knocked out a giant of a man in one punch.”

“...”

I felt relieved, but something seemed off. He was back to normal, serious mode.

“I became interested in your strength,” he continued. “So here I am, ready to see whether the rumors are true.”

“...That a fact?”

“What do you say?”

“All right, I accept.”

“Thanks!” the man exclaimed as he placed his right elbow on the table.

I did the same and clasped his hand before asking, “Ready?”

“Yeah.”

“Ready... Go!”

Right away, I tensed my arm. I put a lot of strength into it. Gay or not, I didn’t want to hold hands with a man for too long, so I tried to end it instantly. However, he didn’t bend.

Our arms trembled, indicating that we were at a standstill. And so, I got serious. Grabbing the table with my left hand, I put all my strength into the right. The balance was broken. Little by little, I pushed him down until the back of his hand was pressed against the table.

I had won.

“Whaaat?! Nee lost?” screamed one of his girls.

“I’m too weak. That’s what happens when you slack off on leveling. Sometimes, a man needs to be taught a lesson.”

“But Nee, I’ve never seen anyone beat you in a show of strength!” the other protested.

“There’s always someone better out there. It just happened to be him, right?”

I could understand their shock, especially from the younger one. I had S-rank strength, yet even I had to give it my all to beat this guy. There was no doubt in my mind that he had A-rank strength.

The man turned back to me and chuckled, “Hahaha, you beat me! You’re incredible, friend.”

“Could say the same about you.”

I was a little wary of a man with A-rank strength. Not because of the other thing, though; I wasn’t really worried about that anymore. And so, I stared at him. We weren’t quite glaring at each other, though, since he took my gaze head-on with a smile.

“Hah! Already settled it, little boys? Who wants some? I’ll show you a real arm-wrestler!” an older man cut in from the side. He was a bulky, hairy-faced man, reminiscent of a Western professional wrestler.

The man plopped down at my table, put his elbow on it, and demanded an arm-wrestle from my previous opponent. He had someone with him, too, but he was a more normal-looking young man.

His friend cut in, saying, “H-Hey, cut it out!”

“Psh, why? I’ve gotta show these little bean-sprouts just how tough the real world can be. Don’t worry, I’m just gonna teach ‘em a lesson.”

“That’s not what I mean. That man is Nep—”

“Yeah, I know.”

The thin man grinned, sat up straight, and clasped the big man’s hand. His opponent’s arm was three times thicker than his own. Now that they were face-to-face, it was clear just how frail-looking this guy was.

“Hey now, just so you know, I won—” I tried to say. However, the thin one quickly interrupted me.

“I’d prefer to go first,” he said. Then, he turned to the big man’s companion and stated, “You may act as the referee.”

“But—”

“Please,” he insisted. “Let the lesson begin.”

“Gahahaha! Oooh, I’ll go easy on—”

Pow!

There was a loud noise as something slammed into the table. It was the big man’s arm. In an instant, it had been bent at an angle that it really shouldn’t have been able to bend.

“Rgraaaaaah!” the big man shrieked.

The young man with him pressed at his own temples in irritation and said, “I tried to stop you. Sorry. Neptune, right? He’s just an idiot, so I beg you, please don’t be too hard on him.”

He bowed at a perfect 90-degree angle in apology.

The slender man, who was apparently named Neptune, maintained his smile as he replied, “Oh, don’t be silly. All we did was have a little arm-wrestling match! Why would I be mad at him?”

“Thank you for your understanding.”

The young man bowed again and dragged his friend away, probably to have his arm treated.

“So...your name’s Neptune?” I asked.

The dining hall erupted in commotion.

“That idiot didn’t even realize?! Princess Lil and Princess Ran are right there, so *of course* that’s the Neptune family!”

“I’ve never seen them in person!”

“Wait, so that other guy beat *the* Neptune at arm-wrestling? Who is he?”

“All I know...is that both of them are total monsters.”

Neptune... I think I’ve heard that name somewhere. And I’m not just talking about the sea god, either.

If you get sent to a new world and you’ve heard someone’s name before you meet them, that usually means they’re a really big deal. I couldn’t remember now, but Neptune was probably one of those people.

“Say, how about a rematch?” he asked.

“I’d rather not. It’s already getting too loud in here.”

“Aww, that’s a shame. Fine. Lil, Ran!”

Neptune turned around as he called his girls’ names.

So they’re finally leaving? I wondered. But suddenly, a strange sound cut

through the air. Everything seemed to shift into slow motion.

Crap! This is bad. I don't know what's going on, but I know something bad is about to happen.

I reflexively punched. It was a full-power, S-rank punch that was meant to protect me at all costs.

Booom!

There was an explosive sound, followed by a shockwave. The table between Neptune and I took the brunt of the force and exploded into splinters. I reeled back, but managed to keep my footing.

"What the hell?" I demanded.

"You're not bad, friend," Neptune mumbled as his arm hung limply from his shoulder. It was bloody and bruised.

I finally realized that what I had punched was his arm. Indeed, we had just punched each other's fists. I rushed to look at my own; it was red and aching, and my wrist hurt as if it had been sprained.

It felt a lot like I'd hit a punching machine as hard as I could, but it seemed I was more or less okay.

The clamor around us grew louder.

"He beat Neptune..."

"Whoa, Neptune really lost, didn't he?"

"Seriously, who *is* this guy?"

Terrified people stared at us—mainly me—from a safe distance. Meanwhile, Neptune was acting totally nonchalant. His older girlfriend, Lil, healed his arm with magic.

“You’re incredible,” he mused. “Hey, listen.”

“...What?”

“Why don’t you join the Neptune family?”

His question didn’t seem hostile at all, but I had to rebut, “Are you gay or not?!”

23. Efficiency Boosted

The crowd of onlookers went nuts.

“Is this real life?!”

“The last invitation to join the Neptune family was three years ago, wasn’t it?”

“And it’s a direct invitation from the leader himself!”

People piped up, seeming awfully surprised. Several onlookers awaited my response with bated breath.

Is this really that big a deal?

“So? What do you say?” Neptune asked, compelling me to answer.

“Sorry. I’m not interested.”

“Aww. That’s a shame. Oh, but let me say just in case: you’re worried I’m sexually interested in you, right? I’m definitely not, so you can put that concern aside and join us.”

“That’s not why,” I replied as I shook my head in firm refusal. Whether he was gay or not wasn’t important to me. I just wasn’t interested in joining a company for the time being.

My life in this new world was wonderful. Now that I was unbound from overtime hell, I was savoring real freedom for the very first time. This was the true meaning of free enterprise. I didn’t know what the Neptune family was, but I didn’t want to be on anyone’s leash.

“Okay, I understand.”

After staring at me for quite some time, Neptune finally assented and respectfully backed off—or so I thought.

“If you ever change your mind, the offer stands. I already consider you an ally.”

He hadn’t backed off at all. Leaving me with those words, Neptune departed with his two women. Hearing his parting words, the crowd resumed chattering.

I only remembered later that the Neptune family was the elite squad that had investigated Nihonium with five people who have A-rank plant drops.

I totally forgot about that.



After that commotion, I received the magic cart from Emily, left the now-awkward dining hall, and went to B1 of Tellurium. What a relaxing place.

Dungeons felt even more calming after everything that had just happened. I took deep breaths, letting the familiar dungeon air seep into my lungs.

It’s time to farm!

A slime appeared before long. I readied my gun—but before pulling the trigger, I caught sight of my magic cart and stopped. A certain thought had crossed my mind.

Nodding, I muttered to myself, “Yeah... If I could do that, I could farm more efficiently.”

As I waited, gun in hand, the slime leaped my way. I thrust out the palm of my hand to catch it, then tossed it behind me. When it was directly above my magic

cart, I pulled the trigger.

The bullet pierced the slime. Out popped a bean sprout mid-air, which fell straight down into the magic cart.

Success!

Shortly thereafter, another slime appeared. I waited, grabbed it, tossed it back when it jumped at me, and shot it above the cart. Again, the bean sprout fell straight in. Before long, yet another slime appeared. This time, its tackle missed me by a little. I reached out and grabbed it, then shot it while holding it above the magic cart. Down fell the bean sprout, into my waiting cart.

This was going well. By defeating monsters above the magic cart, I could skip the step where I picked up the drop. That meant I couldn't shoot on sight, leading to more work, but it still resulted in a net increase in efficiency.



After selling my bean sprouts, I made my way down to B2. It was time to improve my process a little. First off, I pushed my cart so it would always be in front of me.

When I reached B2, a sleep slime promptly appeared and bounced my way. I aimed at it and focused. Then, when it leaped over my magic cart to get to me, I...fired!

The bullet pierced the sleep slime, which dropped a carrot, and the carrot fell into the cart.

Nice! It worked out perfectly!

By keeping the cart directly in front of me, I could shoot the monsters when they jumped at me. This reduced the effort involved in the process. Plus, it was faster than throwing them.

Push the cart, shoot enemy when it jumps at me, receive drop.

Push the cart, shoot enemy when it jumps at me, receive drop.

I loved this process. Doing it almost felt like I was pushing a cart at the grocery store, tossing items in as I went.

As a result of my new process, I filled the magic cart in half the time it had taken last time.

Yeah, this is way more efficient. That means more income, too.

On that day, in pursuit of greater and greater slime-farming efficiency, I ended up taking five trips to Cyclo with a full cart!

“I’ve never had anyone bring me so many cartloads in one day...” Erza mumbled, sounding simply astonished.

24. Freeze Rounds and Flame Rounds

The next morning, I met the same group from before on B1 of Nihonium. The foreman, his four lackeys, and the airheaded Princess Margaret were hard at work. Though amazed by how well their air box business seemed to be doing, I passed by them in hopes of heading straight to B3. However, I noticed that their boxes were clearly different from before.

This time the boxes were cubical, a foot long on all sides. However, what struck me was that one side of each box was all white.

Curious, I asked, “Excuse me. What are these boxes, exactly?”

“Hmm? Oh, we met you before! See, these boxes are special tools. Our company staked its entire future on their development. They’re called... Pandora’s Boxes!”

He was so excited that I could almost see the action lines behind him.

Pandora’s Boxes? That’s a hell of a name.

“What’s so special about them?” I asked.

“You know about pickup boxes, don’t you?”

“No, sir.”

“You don’t! Well, you know how there are clean freaks out there who won’t eat something if someone else has touched it or if it happens to have fallen on a dungeon floor, right?”

“I...suppose some people might be like that.”

I had never met one myself, but they were probably out there somewhere.

“Pickup boxes exist for those exact people,” he explained. “Activate one, and as soon as a monster drops something, it’ll suck whatever it dropped right into the box. With these magical boxes, the drop doesn’t have to touch anyone’s hands or the ground.”

“Very interesting.”

I recalled the process I had mastered yesterday. I’d defeated slimes above the magic cart so that their drops fell right in, but this item did effectively the same thing automatically.

“Our company has invested a staggering 300,000,000 piro into developing these Pandora’s Boxes, which are based on the core principle behind pickup boxes! Watch this,” the man said, signaling the start of their air-farming process.

A skeleton appeared, the four lackeys weakened it, and Princess Margaret finished it off. The skeleton disappeared, and the air drop was sucked into the Pandora’s Box. Finally, the white side of the box was emblazoned with an image of Princess Margaret’s face.

“And there you have it!” the foreman said proudly. “It puts the face of whoever made the drop on this side.”

“Proof of the producer, huh?”

“Yeah. Sometimes, people wonder if it’s *actually* Princess Margaret’s air. With this, we can prove it.”

“I see.”

They really thought this through.

“You’re an adventurer, right? We’ll give you a few of these Pandora’s Boxes if you’re willing to advertise ’em to your buddies,” the man said as he shoved five Pandora’s Boxes my way.

I don’t mind advertising, but do I even have any use for these?



On B3 of Nihonium, I pummeled mummy after mummy, collecting speed seeds as I went.

I had no particular issues all morning, resulting in my speed rising from E to D. With my daily stat-boosting done, I left the dungeon—but I hit upon something as soon as I exited. Could these Pandora’s Boxes, or perhaps even all pickup boxes, allow me to collect, store, and carry the stat-boosting seeds?

With that idea in mind, I went back down to the first floor. The skeletons there dropped HP-boosting seeds thanks to my unique skill. If I could carry seeds out, then I wanted to share them with Emily. In that case, HP came first for safety.

I activated the box and killed a skeleton. It dropped a seed...which was promptly sucked into the box!

This... This might just work!

Beyond excited, I stuffed the box full of HP seeds and left Nihonium.



When I met up with Emily, I gave her the box and had her try to use the seeds inside, but she was unable to.

“I can’t take them...”

“Darn.”

“I think you’re the only one who can use them after all,” she theorized.

“I really thought it would work, too. I mean, I even managed to bring them outside the dungeon.”

“You did your best, but it seems the seeds exist just for you, Yoda.”

Emily wasn’t disappointed at all. I’d hoped that we could max out her stats using the seeds, but it seemed things wouldn’t go so smoothly.

“Shame,” I sighed. “What should I do with all these?”

“Turning them into outsiders for items seems like the only choice. What do skeletons turn into?”

“They become freeze rounds. Well, if I consider it a stable source of freeze rounds—” I froze mid-sentence. A flash of inspiration struck me.

To this point, I had to throw or kick skeletons out of the dungeon entrance, then kill them before they landed in order to get freeze rounds.

Why did I have to do that, you ask? Well, because seeds melted away as soon as I touched them, making it impossible to turn them into outsiders by taking them outside.

If other people defeated skeletons, they dropped air, and outsiders couldn’t be born from air or water. Those factors made it difficult to farm freeze rounds. But if I used these Pandora’s Boxes or whatever, then I could carry a large number of seeds outside.

Praying silently, I left the box on the ground and made some distance. A short while later, it burst open as all the seeds became skeleton outsiders at once. Wielding my gun, I charged in and fired madly, massacring all of the nearly 50 skeletons without letting a single one go.

Each skeleton dropped a freeze round. Before, getting just one had been a tedious process, but now, I had 50 in one trip.

“Incredible, Yoda!”

“Don’t speak just yet.”

“Oh?”

“If I can do this, then...”



Immediately outside of Nihonium, I set down a Pandora’s Box in a place with no people. I then walked away and waited until a horde of zombies hatched from it.

It was just what I’d been hoping for, so I was perfectly calm. I shot a freeze round to freeze all fifty zombies, then downed them with headshots one after another. As a result, they dropped fifty bullets that *weren’t* freeze rounds.

I picked them up, loaded my gun, and fired at a nearby tree. When it struck, a magic circle emerged...and the tree caught fire!

The outsider zombies had given me flame rounds. At that moment, I discovered another of Nihonium’s many possibilities.

25. Disaster Rescue

On the outskirts of Cyclo, I was hard at work turning outsiders into special bullets.

I had received five Pandora's Boxes at first, so I filled them with seeds, took them outside to a place where nobody would go, and turned them into outsiders. There were a whole lot of them, so I did them in batches.

The first and second groups were skeletons. I let them turn into outsiders, then fired madly to collect a hundred freeze rounds.

Third came the zombies. Those I killed with headshots just in case, receiving fifty flame rounds for my efforts.

But while I was getting the last box ready, a strange feeling ran through me. It was uncannier than anything I had felt yet. It came with a strange chill, as if I'd been in subzero temperatures for a second.

What was that? I thought as I looked around dubiously. When I did, I spotted Emily's tiny figure running toward me.

"Oh! Have you been here this whole time, Yoda?"

"Emily? What brings you here?"

"They've just put out a warning about a magic storm. I came to tell you about it."

"A magic storm?"

"Yep. Because of it, magic will be unusable around Cyclo for the time being. It

doesn't matter much for us, but I wanted to tell you just in case."

"Wait, but what exactly is a magic storm? I don't know what that means. Tell me more, please."

"Umm, well, I don't know either. I can't use magic, so I never bothered to learn about it."

"Huh."

You can't use magic in magic storms, huh?

Wanting to know more, I put a hold on turning the last box into special bullets and headed back to town for the moment.



Back in town, I visited Erza, the person who I could talk to most freely. She was just leaving work, so when I invited her to chat, she happily agreed.

Together, we headed to a café.

"Magic storms?" Erza said with a cock of her head.

"Yeah. I don't know anything about them. Could you explain the concept to me?"

"Of course! Leave it to me!" She broke into a smile and patted her chest. "Magic storms are a very rare natural phenomenon. When they appear, people can't use magic."

"They just...can't?"

"Right. It becomes totally unusable. The storms may be small enough to allow

use of magic in the city or large enough to prevent it entirely.”

“Then does that include dungeons?”

Erza nodded in confirmation and replied, “You become totally unable to use it in dungeons, yes. Whenever a magic storm comes, adventurers who use magic have to take time off.”

“That sucks.”

Mages couldn’t do anything without their magic, after all. Sure, there were some mage-types out there who resembled pro wrestlers or monks who liked to dish out punishment with their fists, but for the most part, mages were physically weak.

It seemed like most of my video game knowledge applied to this world. Mages who couldn’t use magic became worse than useless.

“As a result, Cyclo’s having some issues,” Erza added.

“Why’s that?”

“Do you know of the dungeon named Silicon? The monsters there are immune to almost everything aside from magic, but magic is super effective against them. The place is usually teeming with mages.”

“Oh, so when a magic storm comes, production in Silicon stops entirely?”

“That’s right. Silicon mostly drops leaf vegetables, so leafy greens will be expensive for a while. Still, we can predict these storms at least a day in advance, so knowledgeable people get ahead of such difficulties.”

It’s just like a typhoon, huh?

Either way, I got what she was saying. It made sense that such natural phenomena could influence everyday life in this world, too.

Put loosely, this natural disaster resulted in the reduction of drops from specific monsters that were highly resistant to physical attacks.

Magic didn't mean much to me, since I couldn't use it, so now that my curiosity had been sated, I didn't care to hear more.

"Oh? Excuse me for a second, Ryota," Erza said as she stood up and went outside.

I watched as she chased after a man and said something to him. He was wearing mage-like clothes and had a staff in his hand.

"Erza!" the man roared as she approached.

"Reiz, what's got you in such a hurry?"

The man known as Reiz was a mess of pale-faced desperation as he exclaimed, "Rosa's been left behind in Silicon!"



Rosa was Reiz's partner. They were both mages who had recently moved to Cyclo from another city because they had heard of a dungeon here known as the mages' paradise.

As usual, they had gone to Silicon today. However, the magic storm began when Reiz had come to sell off their drops in the city.

The majority of mages knew about the storm a day in advance, so they had either stayed home or finished work early, but the two new residents of Cyclo were entirely out of the loop.

In the end, Rosa was in the dungeon when it began. And as a result, a mage

unable to use magic was stuck alone in the middle of a death trap.



“Tragic, isn’t it?” someone said to me out of nowhere while I listened to Erza and Reiz. It was Neptune, the guy who I thought *might* be a little gay.

“Don’t sneak up on me! You actually scared me.”

“Ready to be mine yet, friend?”

“Don’t make it sound so weird! Besides, now is hardly the time for that,” I said, looking at Neptune angrily.

He shrugged and replied, “Honestly, I doubt there’s much you can do.”

“We can’t give up that easily, can we?”

“Even I don’t want to go near Silicon when a magic storm is at play. It takes me ten whole minutes to defeat the *weakest* monster there.”

“Seriously...?”

I knew Neptune’s strength thanks to our little contest in the tavern. If it took him ten minutes to defeat one enemy...then it was clear just how hard that dungeon was for physical fighters.

“So, sorry as I am, this is an everyday occurrence for us. After all, we’re adventurers who fight dangerous monsters for a living,” Neptune stated nonchalantly. He probably honestly thought so. Likewise for the other people in the café and the people passing by out front. Most of them looked sympathetic, but nobody seemed hopeful.

It was clear that their moral standards were born from a world where all production was done by adventurers risking everything in dungeons.

Maybe that's the normal reaction in this world, I realized.



Still, that didn't mean that I would accept it. I asked for the location and headed to Silicon on my own. Of course, I had decided to save the mage named Rosa.

I took a deep breath and stepped inside.

"I think they said she was on B3."

Recalling what Reiz had told me, I headed through the dungeon. Silicon was another cavern-type dungeon. Its natural dirt walls sprawled far and wide.

I quickly encountered a monster! It was a caterpillar the size of a tissue box. Not very big, but...way too big for a bug. No, it could have been big or small depending on your perspective, but now wasn't the time to think about that. Thus, I ignored it and tried to press on.

However, the monster wouldn't let me go that easily. When I circled around, it started wriggling and suddenly jumped at me!

I countered with a punch, putting all of my S-rank strength into the blow—but it did nothing. Though I'd punched it away and into a wall, it didn't lose even an ounce of vigor.

"All my strength but no damage? Unbelievable."

It seemed their high physical resistance wasn't just for show.

If I couldn't ignore it, then I'd have to kill it. I pulled out my gun and fired a few rounds, but despite its caterpillar-like appearance, they bounced off.

Normal bullets won't work, huh? What should I do?

Just then, I remembered that freeze and flame rounds created small magic circles when they struck. And so, I loaded a flame round and fired it at the lunging insect. It struck true, created a magic circle, and engulfed the caterpillar in flames.

The bug decelerated and fell to the ground. After spasming for a minute, it stopped moving entirely. Then came its drop.

As a leafy green-generating dungeon, Silicon's first-floor caterpillars dropped something akin to cabbage. However, I simply left the drops behind and kept moving.

It seemed special bullets worked. They were unaffected by the magic storm and apparently counted as magic attacks, which was a huge relief. Maybe I could save her... No, I was the only one who could save her.

Using my two special bullet types, I defeated any monsters that attacked me and proceeded onward. The creatures in this dungeon were awfully stubborn. When I tried to ignore them or flee, they would attack incessantly. Normally, I would have appreciated the easy profit, but they were just annoying now.

I couldn't avoid them, so I was forced to use freeze and flame rounds to defeat them as I went.

On B2, I spotted some softball-sized flies. They weren't that "big" either, but they were way too big for flies. Punches and normal bullets didn't work, so I could only defeat them with special bullets. Incidentally, they dropped spinach, which I naturally ignored.

While I reloaded my gun, I realized that the drops I had left behind could serve as markers to show the way back, so I ran around and froze them with freeze rounds. I didn't want them turning back into monsters, after all. Not that I knew if freezing them would prevent that, but I did it anyway.

My guideposts had become an icy path.

I soon arrived at B3. This time, I met grasshoppers the size of a three-year-old!

They're huge!

I defeated them with flame rounds and froze their drops with freeze rounds. They dropped napa cabbage.

"Rosa! Rosa, where are you?!"

She should've been on B3, so I yelled for her as I pored over the area. I walked around for a while in search of her. Occasionally, grasshoppers appeared, so I killed them and froze their drops as usual.

After spending a fairly long time scouring the area, I found a mage in a rather difficult position.

"Rosa... Oh, there you are!"

She was unconscious on the ground. Her chest rose and fell, her breathing was ragged—but she was alive!

Okay. Now I've just gotta carry her back, I thought just as a grasshopper appeared. *I'll kill it. I'm turning back now, so a flame round should be—*

"I'm out of bullets?!"

No flame rounds, no freeze rounds. I had used so many along the way that I was fresh out of both.

The grasshopper lunged at me. Man, was it fast! I dodged and kicked it away, then fired several normal bullets at it.

Unfortunately, they did nothing. Both my S-rank strength and normal bullets did nothing. Plus, the grasshopper was way too fast!

While I wavered over what to do, I ended up taking an attack! It was a lot stronger than the slimes and undead monsters. My HP was S-rank, so I figured it wouldn't knock me out too soon, but I still needed to do something.

I shot endless normal bullets, hoping to somehow defeat it.

I fired, fired, and fired away, dodging and shooting until I realized that I'd spent over a hundred bullets. My surroundings were smoky from the gunpowder explosions.

"Did I get it?"

Unfortunately, I hadn't. The grasshopper lunged forth, cutting through the smoke.

This is bad! What should I do? Should I just run and carry Rosa out, shielding her with my body? I do have S-rank HP...but can I hold out until we reach the surface? Screw it! No point thinking. If I can't defeat it, then I just have to run!

I dodged the grasshopper's attack and ran over to Rosa. Picking up the unconscious girl, I tried to make a break for it.

"No way... Were there always this many?"

There were more grasshoppers now. Five of them had gathered and surrounded me.

Just one was bad enough, but *five*? This...was really bad.

What do I do? What can I do?

As I panicked, I heard a swarm in the distance. A whole lot of monsters were coming.

More grasshoppers?!

But no, they were zombies.

Zombies? Why zombies?

“Yoda!”

“Emily?!”

“Yoda, I brought your box!”

“Oh! Thank you!”

Instantly understanding her plan, I dodged around the grasshopper directly in front of me, defeated an outsider zombie, and received a flame round. Now the situation was under my control again.

I first defeated the grasshoppers with flame rounds, then mopped up the remaining zombies. With newly replenished flame rounds, I escaped alongside Emily and Rosa.

The drops I’d frozen along the way had turned back into monsters, but I mowed them down with the remaining flame rounds. Thus, we successfully made it out alive.



“Thank you! Thank you so very much!”

“Thank you. You...saved my life...”

Reiz and Rosa thanked us profusely.

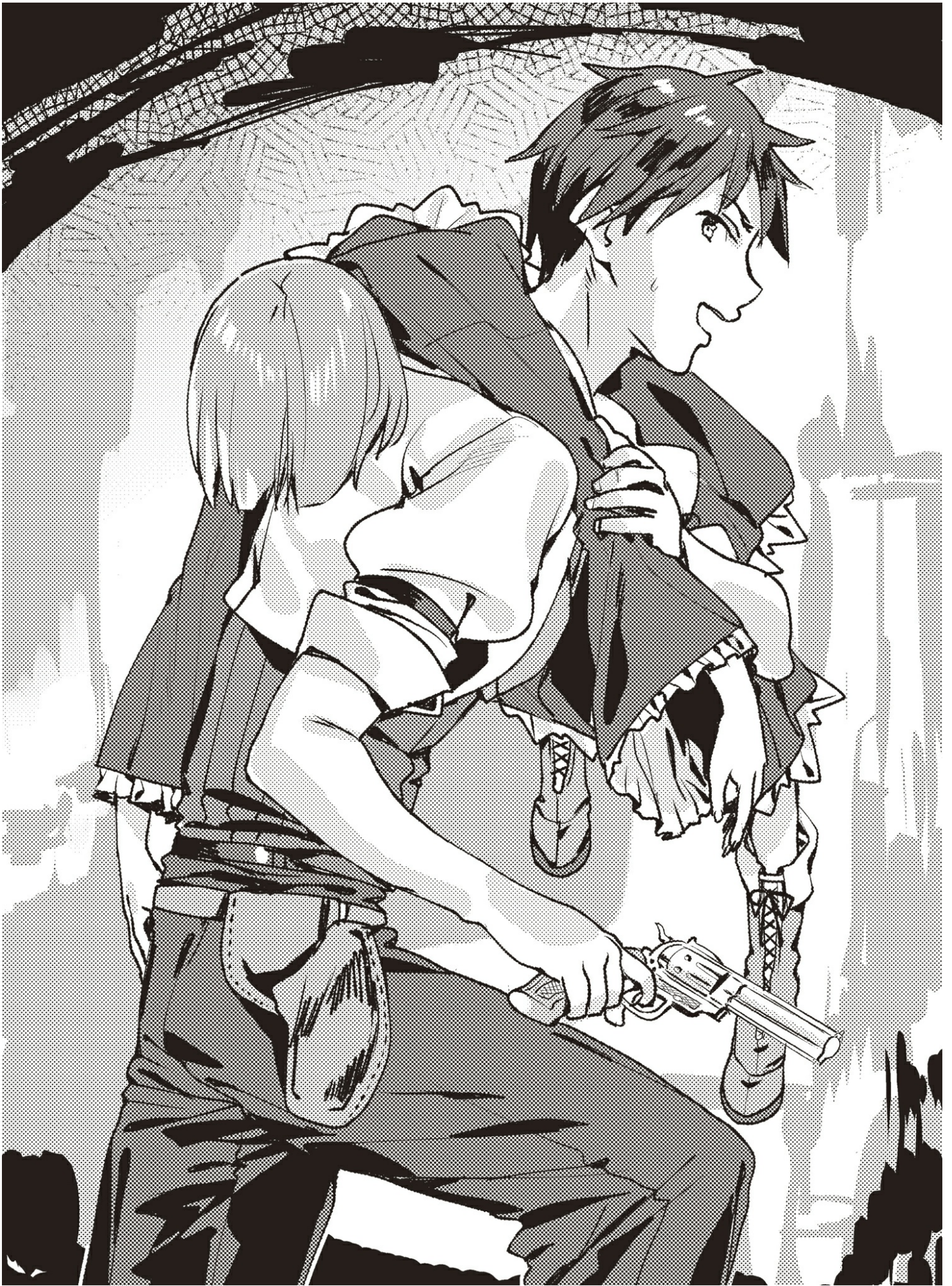
“Don’t worry about it,” I replied. “You really need to go to a hospital, though.”

“Yeah! Let’s go, Rosa!”

“Okay...”

Reiz helped Rosa leave. The two turned around over and over on their way, thanking me again and bowing each time.

I breathed a sigh of relief and thought, *I’m just glad I managed to save her.*



26. The Third Bullet

After seeing off Reiz and Rosa outside Silicon, I thanked Emily.

“Thanks, Emily. I can’t believe you knew where I went.”

“Erza told me about it and gave me the box,” she explained. “She knew you would come here.”

“That so?” I chuckled.

I had given Erza the Pandora’s Box full of strength seeds to take to Emily in order to prevent it from generating outsiders in the middle of the city. My plan was to turn them all into flame rounds later, but Emily had taken care of that for me.

I felt a little uncomfortable knowing that the girls had read me so easily, but I appreciated their help all the same.

“Thanks again, Emily.”

“I’m happy to help.”

“Let’s eat out today. My treat, since you saved me.”

“Why don’t we head home instead?” she offered. “I learned a new recipe today, so I want to have you try it first.”

“Nah, I need to thank you. Can’t exactly have you cook for me as your reward, right?”

“That would be the best way to thank me!” Emily proclaimed as she smiled broadly, as if to punctuate her sentence with a heart.

She's...just too much for me.

Feeling my heart swell, I decided to surrender.

“Let’s at least get some good alcohol on the way home, then. I won’t ask what the meal is so I don’t spoil the surprise, but what drink would pair well with it?”

“I hear hard liquor does.”

“Awesome. Let’s buy enough for two, then.”

“Okay!”

With another eventful day behind us, Emily and I started the walk home.



I started the next day with a trip to Nihonium, but I wasn’t there simply to raise my stats. On the way, I’d bought some normal pickup boxes in Cyclo. They were mainly used by hobbyists, so they were bizarrely expensive at 10,000 piro a pop.

Luckily, that wasn’t too expensive for me, so I ended up buying six.

First, I used four to replenish one hundred freeze rounds and one hundred flame rounds. I had just about run out the day before, after all.

The last two were filled with speed seeds from the B3 mummies, which gave me one hundred new special bullets. The mummies’ special bullets were especially strange. It took until lunchtime for me to test them out enough to truly grasp their effect. Once I was done, I went back to Cyclo to meet up with Emily.



Emily and I took the magic cart full of dandelions to the usual place, Swallow's Returned Favor. Erza's counter had just opened, so we went to see her.

"Yo," I greeted her.

"Oh, Ryota...and Emily."

"We'd like to sell you these. Thanks for all your help."

"Okay. Wait just a moment," Erza said as she took the dandelions from the cart and weighed them. "You know, Ryota, you're becoming somewhat of a legend around these parts. People say you saved someone from Silicon during the magic storm."

"People are already talking about it?"

"That just goes to show what an incredible feat it was!"

"Oh yeah?"

Maybe she was right. Looking back, it was terrifying. Simply remembering the fear of being stuck in a dungeon with no magic—surrounded by enemies that were (probably) immune to physical damage—gave me the heebie-jeebies. Since I'd saved someone under those circumstances, I guess people would naturally talk about it.

"Is she all right?" I asked. "Uh, I think her name was Rosa?"

"Well, I hear she's not doing well at all," Erza answered sadly.

"Why not?"

“This magic storm is so strong that it prevents the use of magic inside the city as well. Rosa sustained heavy injuries, so she’s in trouble because they can’t use healing magic on her.”

“Why can’t they just take her to another city?”

“The wounds are so grave that it’s best to avoid moving her.”

“Oh...”

“So...as much as it hurts, we can only hope that she holds out until the storm lets up.”

I fell silent.

“Oh!” Erza gasped. “I’m sorry for ruining the mood. Umm, I’ve finished weighing them, so it adds up to—”

“Where’s Rosa?” I demanded.

“Huh? Wh-What was that?”

I looked Erza in the eye and firmly asked, “Tell me. Where is she?”

Though shaken and blushing, she managed to tell me where to go.



Thanks to Erza’s directions, I made it to the biggest hospital in Cyclo. I asked reception where Rosa’s room was, and they promptly directed me to it.

When I stepped inside the room, I saw Rosa suffering in bed. Reiz sat next to her, exhausted and with dark circles under his eyes.

“Oh... You’re the guy from yesterday...” he groaned.

“Ryota Sato. How’s she doing?”

“Not well. The doctor says the worst will come tonight. If the magic storm doesn’t end by then...”

“I see.”

“We’ve been waiting for a healer, but if the storm doesn’t pass... Rgh! Why did this have to happen?!” Reiz roared as he punched the wall. His fist was bloody. Blood was coming from his lips, too. He must’ve been so mad that he bit them.

I looked at Rosa and saw her agonized face, pale as a sheet of paper.

I doubt she’ll hold out until tonight. It seems like we need to do something right away.

I took out my gun and loaded it.

“Hey, what are you doing?!” Reiz demanded.

“I’ll finish this quickly.”

“Finish quickly...? Wait—”

Instead of wasting time explaining my plan, I shot Rosa. The bullet struck her heart. Instantly, white light enveloped her. I had farmed a hundred of these special bullets, but it had taken ninety-nine of them for me to figure out their effect, so this was the last one I had.

The white light was healing light. Healing rounds, recovery rounds—whatever I might call them, that was the bullets’ effect.

Rosa, who had been in agony to this point, gradually relaxed. Her face regained its usual color. Eventually, it looked as though she was sleeping soundly.

“Wh-What was that?” Reiz asked.

“She should be fine now. Make sure you have a doctor look at her, though.”

“Y-You saved her...” he mumbled. It seemed he had realized that this power came from the same source that had saved Rosa from Silicon. “Thank you so much! Thank you, thank you!”

After being thanked over and over by Reiz, I left the hospital.

27. An Eye-Catching Item Order

In the morning, I descended to B3 of Nihonium. As the mummies there were clad in bandages, I figured they would probably be weak to fire. And so, I loaded flame rounds and searched for a target, which soon appeared.

When the macho mummy approached with hands outstretched, I shot it with a flame round. It struck true, a magic circle formed, and the mummy burst into flames.

Despite being a walking fireball, the foe tried to advance. However, it only managed to take two steps forward before it collapsed. When it finally stopped moving, its corpse disappeared and I was rewarded with my seed.

I picked it up and my speed rose by 1.

Yeah, this'll do.

I had to expend a lot of normal bullets to kill these mummies, but fighting hand-to-hand was dangerous and inefficient. Luckily, flame rounds killed them in a single shot and kept me safe. As long as I had some, I could get through this floor of Nihonium just fine.

Thus, I used my large number of flame rounds to grind in this otherwise-adventurerless dungeon.

Defeat mummy, get seed, raise speed. Rinse, repeat.

In just half of one morning, I had gone from a D to a C.

By the way, I confirmed this later, but I could tell from experience about how long it took to raise a stat that far, which meant I knew without leaving to check

my stats.

I used the remaining half of the morning to fill the pickup boxes I had brought.

Use box, find mummy, kill with flame round.

Use box, find mummy, kill with flame round.

I repeated that process until I had secured fifty recovery rounds.



That afternoon, I brought my daily 40,000 piro's worth of bean sprouts to the Swallow's Returned Favor. Ina took care of the sale and gave me my exact earnings. However, before I could leave to begin farming carrots...

"Mr. Sato? Can we talk for a minute?" Ina asked, stopping me in my tracks.

It seemed she had something she wanted to say, but couldn't. I often saw her playfully ribbing her friend Erza, so I thought of her as a cheerful person. Given how rare it was for her to make such a serious face, my curiosity was piqued.

"I need to talk to you about something, but this isn't a good place," she said, guiding me outside.

We went behind the store, which was utterly deserted.

"So...my family runs a greengrocer."

"Uh, okay?"

"But they're not doing so hot right now. Cyclo's the agricultural city, y'know? It has tons of greengrocers, and they sell a lot of the same stuff as the other places, so there's not much reason to pick them."

“Makes sense.”

“So...y’know, I was wondering if you could sell us anything, at regular intervals, that might draw more people to our family business,” she asked as she peeked up at me timidly. “Is that...too much to ask?”

“Not at all,” I promptly replied. I was happy to help, especially when it was such a simple favor.



If we were trying to draw people to their store, then it would be best if I got something entirely new. Thus, I traveled to a new floor. Namely, B5 of Tellurium.

After a short walk, I encountered a monster. It had started as multiple slimes, but then one of them suddenly devoured another. When it did, it changed shape to look like two round slimes joined together. It then devoured *another* slime, becoming three slimes joined together.

Slimes eating other slimes and getting bigger... Yeah, I’ve played games with that feature, I thought to myself as I readied my gun.

First, I tried regular bullets. I steadied my aim and went for a headshot. The slime’s head went flying, but its torso became a new head. It kind of reminded me of what happened when a starfish’s arms were cut off.

Normal bullets are inefficient, then.

I switched to flame rounds. When the serpentine slime lunged at me, I evaded and hit it with a flame round as it passed. It burst into flames, fell to the ground,

and before long...it was dead.

Pop!

Out dropped a huge watermelon.



I took the watermelon and left the dungeon. Ina, who had been waiting at the entrance, ran over to me.

“Mr. Sato!”

“How’s this?” I asked.

“Thank you! So this is your...” Ina stared at the watermelon as she trailed off.
“It looks...pretty average, doesn’t it?”

“Huh?”

“Oh, sorry. I don’t mean it like that! Umm, I’m sure it tastes really good. The Ryota Bamboo Shoots looked normal, too, so—”

“No, you’re right. It’s important to be honest.”

“Huh?” Ina muttered as she froze up.

“Wait here. I’ll bring you something. Oh, but check the taste for me while I’m gone, okay?”

“Okay...”

I left the bewildered Ina behind and went to bring *it*.



That evening, I brought Ina down to B5 of Tellurium, realizing it would be easier to show her what I was doing rather than explain it.

“How did the watermelon taste?” I asked.

“It was delicious! I’ve never had such a sweet, refreshing watermelon! It reminded me that you’re a cut above the rest, Mr. Sato!”

“Oh? So you’re saying the quality is just fine?”

“Yep!”

“Then...”

A slime appeared and interrupted me.

“Oh, a snake slime!” Ina said, apparently recognizing it.

“That’s really its name?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay... Well, watch.”

I looked around just in case and confirmed that there were no monsters other than the four-segment-long snake slime. Leaving Ina, I stepped forward.

With my gun at the ready, I put a certain item on the ground. When the heavy slime lunged, I aimed carefully and fired a flame round.

The snake was rather long, but like before, it instantly erupted into flames, fell, and died. Then, it dropped a watermelon, which was sucked up instantly.

It was drawn into the item I had placed, a Pandora’s Box.

“A pickup box?” Ina said as she looked at it quizzically.

“Not quite. This is called a Pandora’s Box. It’s a slightly improved version made by an acquaintance.”

“Pandora’s Box? Oh! It has your face on it.”

“As you can see, it displays the face of whoever defeated the enemy. Now it ought to look special too, right?”

“Oh!” Ina gasped. “Mr. Sato’s watermelons...”

Her eyes shone more and more as she gazed upon the Pandora’s Box labeled with my face.



The next morning, I went into the city before dungeoneering. Or more specifically, I went to Ina’s house, the location of which I had asked her for yesterday.

A crowd had already formed at the greengrocer early in the day. Everyone was looking at the Pandora’s Box placed conspicuously up front and arguing about it.

“What’s that box?”

“You don’t know? That’s one of those Pandora’s Boxes that Princess Margaret’s been selling her air in. Use that, and you can tell who made the item inside.”

“Wowww! So the guy on the box made this watermelon? ‘Ryota Sato’... Hey, that’s the bamboo shoot guy!”

“Whoa! So Ryota makes bamboo shoots and watermelons?”

“I wanna taste that. Sir, how much is it for this watermelon?”

“Wait, wait! If Ryota made that, I want first dibs!”

“Nah, I’m buying it. Those bamboo shoots are ridiculously good, so I want to try the watermelon.”

Suddenly, people were scrambling for it. The storefront was soon filled with people trying to buy the watermelon. Passersby came closer to see what was going on, adding to the commotion.

Eventually, it turned into a bit of an auction, drawing *even more* people in.

“Thank you, Mr. Sato.”

“Ina?”

Ina suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

Well, not out of nowhere. I mean, it is literally her house.

She thanked me again, eyes upturned.

“Really, thank you.”

“Don’t mention it.”

I was happy, both to have accomplished my task and to have been thanked for it.

Incidentally, I was also thanked by the people selling Margaret’s boxed air for successfully advertising their Pandora’s Boxes.

28. Stat Up, Rank Up, Stat Up

Before going to Nihonium, I checked my stats on the status board out front.



Because I couldn't level up, all of my stat boosts were from seeds, which meant that my stats were very poorly balanced. I still had a long way to go, but I was confident that if I just kept on farming Nihonium all the way down to B9, I'd have S-ranks across the board.

So really, even if I was poorly balanced now, the thought that I'd keep growing was exciting.

I recalled *Monster Quest* had tameable monsters that wouldn't listen to your orders until they had enough Wisdom, but they came with a really low wisdom stat, so you had to use items to raise it before they'd obey orders. Funny enough, I was a lot like them.

There were two status pages, so I went ahead and checked the second page.



This page had stats that influenced drops. All of mine had started at S, so they obviously hadn't changed at all.

After checking my stats, I refocused and entered the dungeon. First stop: B2. My ultimate goal was the speed seeds on B3, but I first had to procure flame rounds for efficient farming, so I stopped here instead. I used a pickup box, headshotted every zombie I saw, and collected their seeds.

Incidentally, although I ran into the undead monsters of Nihonium often, I didn't take a single point of damage today. That was because of my new C-rank speed. Even when walls collapsed and I got ambushed, I could back off to safety in an instant, calm down, and aim for my foe's head.

I loved how it felt to see my stat boosts in action, so I collected flame rounds and mass-slaughtered mummies with great efficiency. In the end, my speed grew from C to B in one morning.



That afternoon, I didn't feel much like working. The weather was nice and the

city was lively, so I was in the mood to take it easy. However, I *did* still travel to Tellurium. On B4, I killed a few bat slimes. On B5, I killed a single snake slime and put its watermelon in a Pandora's Box. After I'd secured the minimum for my friends, I was done for the day. Or...so I thought.

"Ryota, you've gone to B5 of Tellurium, correct?" Erza asked timidly as we confirmed the price of my bamboo shoots.

"Yeah, I have. Why?"

"What about other dungeons? How deep have you gone?"

"Other dungeons?" I repeated as I thought for a moment. "I've reached B5 of Tellurium, B3 of Nihonium, B3 of Silicon, though only to save someone, and B1 of Arsenic... Oh, but I *did* go all the way to B10 to save someone else."

"I see..."

"Why do you ask?"

"You don't have a license yet, do you?"

"A license?" I asked back, curious. I hadn't heard that word yet in this world.

"You don't know? You can't farm deeper than B5 in Cyclo's dungeons without a license."

"Oh, so it's like a permit that I need to get?"

"Right. This is true of all the world's dungeons, but every five floors, a dungeon's danger level increases greatly, so cities with dungeons make policies to keep people safe. Cyclo's policy is simply that you need a license every five floors."

"What do other cities do?"

"In other cities, people without licenses can't sell things. People also have to

pay triple the medical fees if they get hurt in an area they're not permitted to visit."

"Oh. They sure think of everything here, don't they?"

This was all really interesting. In a world where dungeon monsters dropped all materials, there were naturally a lot of interesting rules.

I remembered the drop stats I had checked this morning. They were all S, so I would've loved to check out cities beyond Cyclo as well.

While I fantasized about other cities, Erza pulled me back to reality by saying, "So... I have a favor to ask you."

"Yeah?"

She timidly, and a little apologetically, brought up her favor.

"If you don't have a license yet, I'd like you to get one. Umm, shops like ours go up in rank when our regulars have licenses."

"Oh, I get it."

That made sense. Licenses served as a barometer of your quality as an adventurer. Adventurers weren't tied to a single purchasing shop, but others might see regulars as essentially being tied to one client. And if a shop had a lot of regulars with licenses, then it would look better.

Erza looked at me with her eyes lowered. She seemed to feel guilty for asking that of me. Still, she and this shop had done a lot for me, so why not pay them back?

"All right. Just tell me where to go and what to do."

Once I had a grasp of what to do, I readily agreed.



Using a map I'd received from Erza, I arrived at a public office in Cyclo. I went into a grand building modeled after a vegetable and walked downstairs as directed. Once there, I arrived in a way-too-big room. It reminded me of a firing range I'd visited in Hawaii.

There was one counter where a middle-aged man was seated.

"What do you want?" he asked a little languidly.

"Umm, I came to get a license to farm past B5 in dungeons."

"Got any accomplishments?"

I repeated the words Erza had told me to say: "I regularly provide watermelons from B5 of Tellurium."

The man remained languid, but he slowly stood up and started walking.

"...We're gonna test you."

"A test?"

"Tellurium, yeah? You pass if you show me you can defeat a monster from the lower floors."

"Very simple," I mused.

"The most important thing is whether you can consistently defeat them."

"Fair."

In this world, people regularly went into dungeons in order to get drops from monsters—or in other words, to produce goods. It wasn't like a video game where you went in once and defeated the boss; the most important ability was

to be able to go in every single day and bring back a steady supply of goods.

In other words, simple was best. If you had the strength to consistently defeat enemies, then they'd have no problem letting you delve deeper.

"Got it. So I just need to go to B6 of Tellurium, right?"

"...No, you'll take the test right here."

"Huh?"

While I was confused, the man prepared the test. He placed a melon in the very center of the huge room.

I think I know what he's doing.

He returned, then we waited a while at a distance from the melon. The melon turned into an outsider, returning to its original monster form. It was a slime with metallic coloring.

"A metal slime...?"

"They're called steel slimes," the man corrected me. "These boys are so hard that blades don't work on them."

"So I just have to beat it?"

"...Yeah."

"All right, then."

I left the man and stepped forward. The steel slime bounced toward me. It didn't seem malicious at all, though. Even when it noticed me, it didn't attack. I didn't know why, but either way, I went for a punch first.

The steel slime went flying, but took no damage.

That thing's tough. No damage from S-rank strength, huh?

I'd imagined as much, though, when I'd called it a metal slime.

Then let's get serious this time.

I whipped out my revolver and loaded two bullets. Then, I fired both at the bouncing steel slime, though with a delay.

They both struck...and magic circles emerged. The first engulfed the slime in flames, while the second froze it. I then walked over and poked it lightly.

Crack!

The steel slime shattered. It also dropped a bullet, but I smoothly picked it up to keep the man from seeing.

"...What was that?" he asked. The man still appeared rather languid, but there was a hint of surprise in his voice.

"A stress fracture. If hard things like that are both heated and cooled in a short period, they become brittle."

"...You sure know your stuff," the man replied, sounding genuinely amazed.

That was pretty common knowledge. Did people in this world not know that?

Well, not like it really matters.

More importantly, I successfully obtained a license that allowed me to farm down to B10 of all of Cyclo's dungeons.

After leaving the office, I realized something.

Freeze rounds and flame rounds, stress fractures... I sure could use another gun.

29. The Greatest Manager and a New Weapon

I concocted a plan. While Emily and I ate a delicious breakfast in our warm home, I brought it up to her.

“I need to go out for two—no, three days,” I said.

“Where are you going?” she asked with a cock of her head.

The short girl looked very comfortable in her apron. Seeing her made me feel at ease, like I was truly home. Knowing that I wouldn’t get to see her for a while made me reluctant to leave, but I wanted to do this now, so I had no other choice. After all, I had something I needed to do.

“I need some money,” I explained. “About 1.5 million piro, actually.”

“That much?!”

“Yeah. If I farm the dungeon floors I’m used to for three days straight, I ought to be able to do it.”

That naturally meant no sleep or rest, but I decided not to mention that. I loved my leisurely life in this world, but right now, I wanted to make money and achieve my goal as quickly as possible.

“That’s why you’ll be gone for three whole days?”

“Yeah. Of course, I’ll be in Tellurium the whole time.”

“Understood,” Emily replied, readily giving in. I appreciated that, since I would’ve felt bad if she’d complained. But then she added, “I’ll go with you.”

“Huh?”

“I want to help you over those three days,” Emily declared with a huge smile, as if it were the most normal thing in the world.



On B1 of Tellurium, I encountered a slime. I baited it in front of my magic cart, shot it with a regular bullet, and obtained a bean sprout drop. I then repeated that process and obtained 40,000 piro in no time.

“I’ll take those now,” Emily said.

“Are you sure about this?”

“Yes! I want to help you, Yoda.”

She took the bean sprouts from the cart and filled her sack with them.

“What are you doing?”

“Hup... I’ll go sell them. You keep using the magic cart.”

“But isn’t that really heavy?!”

“I’m just fine!” Emily replied, smiling, and left with the sack on her back. It was so full of bean sprouts that it almost obscured her entire body. From afar, it looked as though the sack was floating or moving around on its own.

And yet, Emily walked on jauntily. Should’ve expected as much from a girl with A-rank strength who could swing around a two-hundred-pound hammer with ease.

She’s really doing a lot to help out. I’d better do my best, too.

Now alone, I continued pushing the magic cart around the area.

Shoot slime, receive bean sprout.

Shoot slime, receive bean sprout.

Just as I'd filled it with bean sprouts again, Emily returned.

"Thank you for waiting," she greeted me.

"We've got a full cart again."

"I'll take those bean sprouts off your hands."

"Thanks. Oh, I'll be going down for carrots next."

"Okay. Then I'll search for you on B2."

"Please do."

After giving her the bean sprouts, I went down to B2 and began farming carrots from sleep slimes. I fired on and on, getting 40,000 piro worth of carrots in what felt like no time flat. Except...

"This isn't good," I groaned. "I'm running out of bullets."

By the third load, I was low on ammo. Or more specifically, I was low on regular bullets. I still had plenty of my special freeze, flame, and recovery rounds, but I knew it would be a waste to use them.

It would reduce my efficiency, but I figured I might as well switch to bare-handed fighting.

"Thank you for waiting," Emily greeted me again.

"Emily."

"You're full on carrots, I see. I'll take them."

"Thanks. Oh, but you can take it easy from here on out. I'll be farming a lot slower now."

“Oh, don’t worry about that.”

“Hmm?”

“You’re coming with me,” Emily declared as she took my hand and pulled me out of the dungeon.

I asked her why along the way, but she didn’t answer. We eventually reached a place with little foot traffic...and found Eve. She was a strange girl, with her natural bunny ears and revealing bunny suit.

“Thank you for waiting.”

“Carrots...”

“Here you go,” Emily said. She took a carrot from her sack and handed it to Eve.

“Delicious... Ryota carrot...” Eve mumbled, seemingly overjoyed to receive her precious carrot. And then, to my astonishment, she sprinted off. I followed her with my eyes and saw about ten slimes. She had herded them into one place like a sheepdog.

“Outsiders?” I asked.

“I asked Eve to watch these slimes made from bean sprouts.”

“And the carrot was her reward?”

“Go on, Yoda. Replenish your bullets.”

I was moved. Stunned into silence, even. Emily had kept an eye on my remaining ammo and saved some of the bean sprouts so they could be made into outsiders. She’d even called a helper to keep them in one place.

“I said I’d help you, Yoda,” she said with a smile.

“This is more than just helping. Thank you so much!”

“It is my pleasure,” Emily replied. Blushing as if embarrassed, she ran off like the wind, hauling the 40,000 piro’s worth of carrots on her back.

I’d better thank her properly once we’re finished here.

I refilled my bullets using the outsiders they’d prepared and went back into the dungeon.



I defeated monsters, gathered the item drops, and handed them to Emily to sell. Whenever I was about to run out of bullets, we’d take a carrot to the surface and give it to Eve in exchange for the outsiders she’d been guarding. After that, I’d come back and repeat the whole process.

I was wholly absorbed in killing monsters. The sun set, and darkness fell, but I continued working through the night. The second morning came, lunchtime passed, and it became night again.

On the second night, Emily finally announced, “We’ve reached our goal of 1.5 million piro.”

We had finished a whole day ahead of schedule!

My gratitude toward Emily only grew.



We spent 1.5 million piro to buy a whole tuna.

That's tuna for you. It costs a fortune just to buy one.

Late at night, on the outskirts of Cyclo, I watched the tuna I'd left on the ground. My heartbeat intensified. The excitement of an all-nighter combined with the anticipation for what would happen next, sending my heart rate soaring to new heights.

Eventually, the tuna became an outsider—a gorilla. It was the same kind of giant, house-sized gorilla that had rampaged through the city.

“Yoda!”

“Leave this to me. I have to be the one to defeat it.”

“Okay!” Emily exclaimed as she saw me off with a smile.

I ran toward the massive monster and loaded my ammunition. Last time was a tough battle, but I'd be just fine this time.

The gorilla noticed me, raised an arm, bared its sharp fangs, and tried to intimidate me as it approached.

I fired several freeze rounds at it. Each one struck its massive body—it would honestly have been harder to miss—and froze all but the gorilla's head.

“Grooooargh!”

Its roar, full of shudder-inducing rage, boomed through the air. But to me, it simply sounded like a dying animal's last cry.

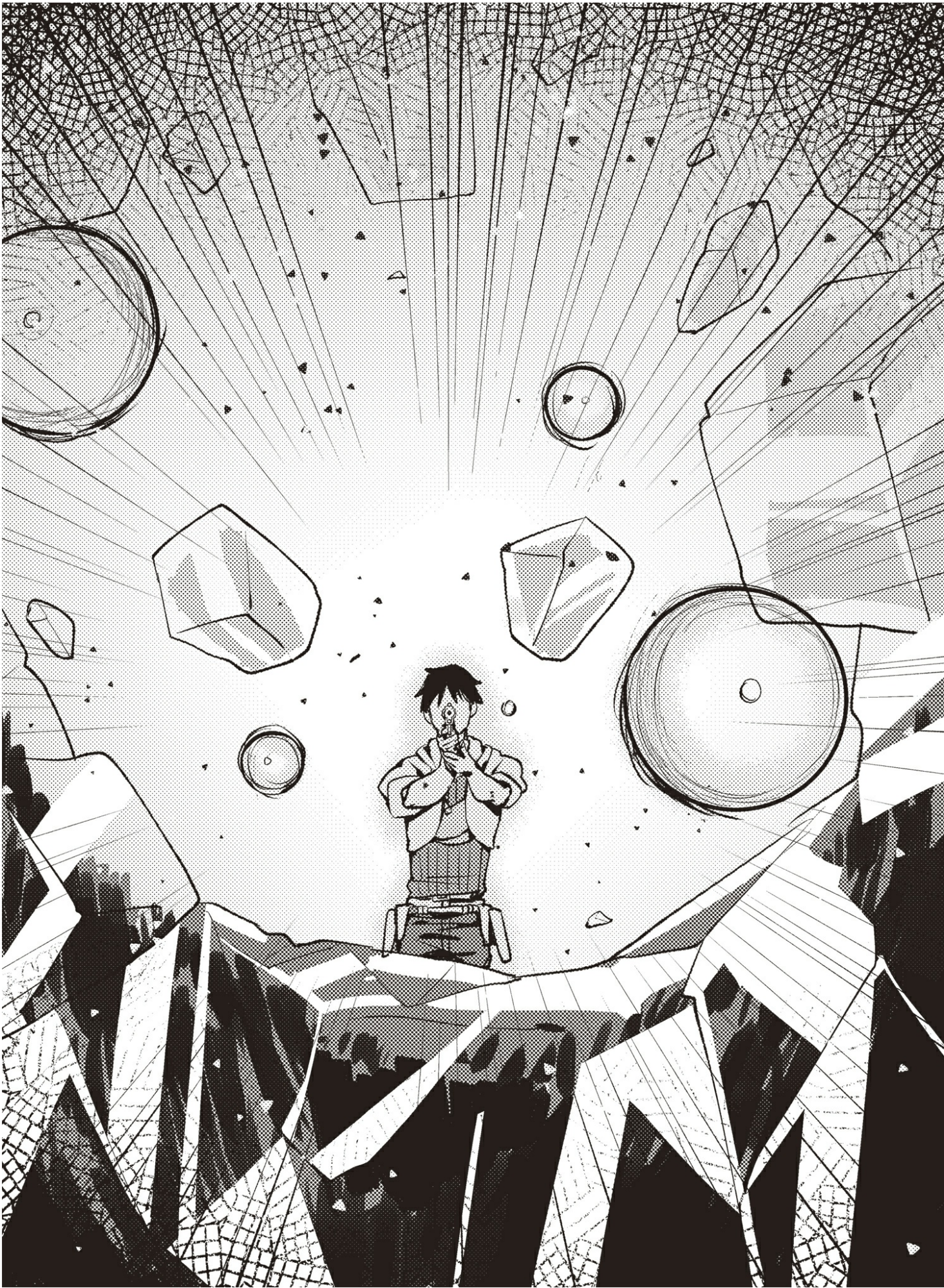
I loaded new bullets and climbed the gorilla's frozen body.

“You're done for.”

Then, I pumped multiple shots directly into its head.

I emptied the whole cylinder, reloaded, and emptied it again. Once I'd done that, the gorilla's head finally flew off. The beast's body disappeared shortly thereafter.

Like before, thanks to the power of my S-rank drops, I got a handgun and ammunition.



30. Limitless Possibilities

The next day, I went back to Nihonium. My plan was to test dual-wielding guns now that I had more firepower. I had come here with pickup boxes in tow so that I could replenish my ammunition when I inevitably ran out.

First stop, B1. As usual, a skeleton appeared. There was quite some distance between us, so I steadily aimed both weapons. I had a second gun now, so I could rapid-fire more easily. The all-bones monster ate lead and quickly shattered to pieces.

Next, I went to B2 and searched for a zombie. I had a grasp of where they'd appear, so I beelined toward a spawn point and quickly encountered one.

I got away from it and rapid-fired, actively avoiding headshots. Unlike bony skeletons, the zombies had (rotting) flesh, so when shot, they flailed madly. The sight reminded me of movies and the like, which was refreshing.

Next stop, B3. But on my way there, I was ambushed by a zombie!

The zombie groaned, "Ooogh, aaagh..." as it swung an arm to attack me. I knocked it away with my left-hand gun and headshotted it with my right. Though...knocking it away was more of a lucky accident than anything.

"Very satisfying. It's like gun-fu."

I'd once seen a movie where they combined dual-wielding guns and martial arts, but it was even more exciting to accidentally imitate it.

I gathered my bearings and continued to B3. There, I'd fight the sturdy mummies. Normal bullets didn't work well against them, so I loaded my guns

with flame and freeze rounds. Then, I searched for—and found—a mummy. I readied my guns and pulled the triggers, firing both rounds at about the same time. As a result, I was treated to the gratifying sight of the bandage-covered mummy freezing, then going up in flames.

Another mummy appeared and I did the same, except...what luck! The bullets collided mid-air! The freeze and flame rounds hit each other right before they struck the mummy.

Screee!

A peculiar high-pitched noise resounded through the area. Then, my eyes just about popped out of my head. The mummy's body was gouged. Well, "gouged" wasn't entirely the correct word.

The mummy's chest—about where the bullets collided—was just...missing. There was nothing there, as if someone had drawn a mummy and then erased that part cleanly with an eraser. Or as if all matter there had been scooped out and replaced with empty space.

"What in the world...?"

I stared in astonishment as the mummy disappeared and dropped a speed seed.

Did that happen because the bullets collided?



I entered B1 of Arsenic and heard the rhythmic smashing of rocks.

"Emily!" I called out.

“Yoda? What brings you here?”

“I had something I wanted to test, and I figured these super-hard monsters would be perfect,” I answered as I looked around.

Arsenic’s monsters were all rocks. It was teeming with monsters that took way too much effort to defeat normally, even with S-rank strength.

“What are you testing?” she asked.

We lived together, but monsters were like assets in this world. Taking her monsters without asking would have been akin to theft, so I asked for permission.

“Sorry, but I’m gonna need a few of your monsters.”

“Take as many as you want.”

“Thanks. Huff...” I took a deep breath, focused, and aimed. Then, I pulled both triggers at the same time, pointing the guns at a dante rock.

The fired rounds collided right before they hit the monster, freeze round and flame round mixing to erase a basketball-sized portion of space. The dante rock turned into a crescent moon shape, as if seventy percent of it had been gouged out by a mindflayer’s tentacles. Right after that, it disappeared and rewarded me with a dandelion.

“That’s awesome!” Emily screamed excitedly. “What did you just do? Is that a new drop?”

“Nope. I used freeze rounds and flame rounds, products of B1 and B2 of Nihonium. When I fire them at the same time and the bullets collide, it leads to this.”

“It leads to that...?”

“I guess you could call it...an annihilation round?”

“Annihilation round... Incredible. It sounds so cool!”

Leaving Emily to her excitement, I tested it again. First, I fired both guns simultaneously. After failing once, resulting in a rock freezing, then burning, I succeeded in making another annihilation round. A space that was about a foot wide around the point of impact was gouged out.

I had to get better at producing the effect, but it seemed pretty damn strong to me. That was the true value of the second gun and the 1.5 million piro that went into getting it.

“Are freeze and flame rounds the only combination?” Emily asked, interrupting my train of thought.

“Huh?”

“Umm, you have two other kinds of bullets, right? Are there any other combos you could try?”

“...”

A sense of utter shock overwhelmed me. I was amazed by my complete lack of critical thinking. How had I not thought of that already?

I loaded in new bullets. This time, I used two regular bullets. I fired, fired, and fired again.

None of them hit each other. Instead, they simply sent sparks flying as they bounced off the dante rock’s body. I kept going until two finally collided. When two normal bullets hit each other...they became one bullet and shot through the dante rock!

Before, they’d been repelled by the rock, but this time, they carved a clean

hole through the middle as if someone had used a drill.

“Wow! It went through!”

“Yeah. That was awesome...” I mumbled as I gazed at the disappearing monster, then at my guns.

I wasn't a master by any stretch of the imagination, so I knew it would take time for me to learn to use them well. However, this second gun had blessed me with the ability to combine bullets, something that essentially provided limitless possibilities.

It was right then and there that I realized I had bought something worth far more than 1.5 million piro.

Extra Side-Story

Helium, a dungeon famous for producing all kinds of wine, was full of adventurers mowing down monsters as usual. Young Emily came to the dungeon every single day to watch her mother valiantly defeat monsters.

This floor's monster was the iron golem. It was a metal giant that stood more than six feet tall. Emily's mother, Reina, was merely 4'3". At about half the golems' height and with slender limbs, it didn't look like she'd stand a chance against them. And yet, the actual fights between them leaned heavily in her direction.

Reina jumped elegantly out of the way of an iron golem's punch. When its fist got stuck in the ground, she dashed up its arm like it was a set of stairs and struck it in the face with a powerful kick. She then dashed around the iron golem, which had been hit hard enough to dislodge its fist from the ground, and canceled its momentum with a front kick. Finally, as it flew into the air for a moment, she pummeled it with a flurry of additional kicks.

In the space of three minutes, Reina had bested the metal giant without a weapon, turning it into a mere heap of scrap. She was rewarded with purple wine in turn.

"Mommy, you're awesome! Good job!" Emily exclaimed as she ran over and stared at her mother with stars in her eyes.

"Hahahahahaha! That's what happens when ya pick a fight with me!"

"Hahahahahaha!" the child laughed, poorly imitating her mother. Since they were both small for their respective ages, the boisterous laugh seemed odd.

And yet, even more strangely, it fit Reina to a T.

“Okay, where’s my next victim?”

“Where, where?”

Mother and child walked around the dungeon together, searching for prey. Just then, they heard cries for help.

“Gwah!”

“H-Help us!”

They turned around and saw three adventurers cornered against a wall by another iron golem. One had already fallen, while the other two wielded broken weapons, so even a child could tell they were in grave danger.

The iron golem swung its thick arm down toward the adventurers.

“Good grief!” Reina said as she grimaced and leaped forward. She then kicked two of the adventurers out of the way, stepped in front of the golem, and took the blow for their fallen comrade who couldn’t escape.

Reina crossed her arms to take the massive monster’s attack. The impact caused her feet to dig slightly into the ground.

The iron golem attacked Reina once more. She seized the fallen adventurer, tossed him out of the way, and blocked the golem’s fist.

“Mommy!” Emily screamed. The sight of her mother being attacked was too much to bear. And yet, the iron golem cared not for the child’s feelings and set upon Reina once more.

Reina evaded it...but she was clearly moving slower than before. She was able to dodge the first attack by jumping to the side, but when the iron golem continued its assault, she was unable to react in time, so its arm ended up

grazing her flank.

That alone was all it took to launch her away—but instead of striking the wall, she flipped mid-air, kicked off of the wall, and charged at the iron golem again.

Reina gritted her teeth, put all of her strength into her dominant leg, and showered the golem with kicks akin to a meteor shower.

“Haaaaaah!” Reina exclaimed. Her voice and the sounds of metal being kicked filled the cavern.

Metal was dented and crushed. Finally, after the one-sided assault, the golem disappeared and was replaced by wine.

Reina landed and exhaled all the air from her lungs. Wiping the blood from the corner of her mouth, she turned to the adventurers she’d saved.

“Phew... You three. Anyone hurt?”

“Thank you so much...”

“You saved our li—”

Pow!

Reina punched the least-wounded man’s head.

“You’re this party’s leader, ain’tcha?” she asked.

“Y-Yes, ma’am!”

“Get a better grasp of your party’s strength so ya don’t bring ’em to floors they can’t handle. You’re not just hurtin’ your party, but draggin’ others into yer mess, too.”

“...Understood, ma’am.”

The three adventurers slumped over upon hearing her scolding. They looked

young and didn't have the faces of hardened adventurers. Any veteran would have known that they were newbies who had pushed themselves too hard. Though honestly, such a short woman lecturing them was still a funny sight.

"Mmm, good. By the way, you three drink?" Reina asked.

"Huh? Y-You mean alcohol?"

"We can, but..."

"Why do you ask?"

"Duh! When you survive a life-or-death bind, you *drink*," Reina declared as she offered them the wine dropped by the iron golem. As funny as it was to see her lecture them, it was just as funny to see her invite them to drink with her.

Hearing Reina's invitation, nearby adventurers started to gather.

"Oh? What's that, another party?"

"That's the three hundred sixty-fifth in three hundred sixty-five days!"

"She really does that every single day?"

"Yeah, it's another party!" Reina announced. "C'mon, get yer drink, boys 'n' girls!"

One person complained, "Seriously? We've had crappy drops today..."

"Who cares? Drink and you'll get more drops!"

"Bull!"

Reina turned to her daughter and said, "Emily, make us some snacks, 'kay?"

"Okay!" Emily readily agreed and retrieved a set of cooking utensils from their luggage. She then began cooking on the spot. The three newbie adventurers watched, dumbfounded.

People drank, ate, sang, and danced. Whenever an iron golem came to attack, someone would stand up and kill it in an instant. Then, they'd return with more wine in hand. The newbies were aghast at these veteran adventurers' behavior.

The young Emily was well-acclimated to this. She supported her mother, so the veteran adventurers doted on her like a mascot. That was the Reina Emily knew: she put her life on the line to save other adventurers and, even when she was beaten up in the process, was the life of the party.

She truly was a hero in the girl's eyes.



Emily desperately ran over to her mother. As usual, Reina was delivering death to iron golems in the form of meteor shower-like kicks.

The girl leaped into the protection of her heroic mother's bosom.

"Mommy!"

"Hmm? What's wrong, Emily?"

"A dragon! A dragon's appeared!"

"Come again?"

Clinging tight to her mother, Emily screamed, "There's a dragon over—!"

At that exact moment, a roar shook the dungeon, interrupting her.

Reina furrowed her brow and stared in the direction of the roar. At the same time, all the surrounding adventurers clamored.

"That roar...!"

“It’s a legacy dragon!”

“It’s too dangerous! Everyone, run!”

One roar had scared all of them away.

“Tch! A legacy dragon in a place like this?!”

“An adventurer died!”

“Another idiot who overestimated his own strength!” Reina spat resentfully.

Adventurers’ deaths in dungeons could occasionally cause calamities. If the corpse was in an easy-to-find place, then it wasn’t a major issue, but if their life had ended while they were off the beaten path, then they would never be found, causing their belongings to turn into outsiders.

Stronger adventurers often wore higher-quality equipment, which frequently came from incredibly strong monsters. Monsters couldn’t exist on different floors of their own dungeon, but if they were in another dungeon, then they could be revived as outsiders, since they were treated as being outside their dungeon.

In short, an adventurer’s death could lead to the catastrophe that was strong monsters being unleashed in an otherwise safe dungeon, which was what had just happened.

“Eeeeeek!” A shrill cry rang out through the caves.

“That came from the direction of the dragon!”

“Tch!” Reina clicked her tongue and ran off—not with the frantically escaping adventurers, but toward the source of the scream.

“Mommy?!”

Emily followed her and saw *it*. There was an enormous dragon, covered in

scales like rotten wood. Not far in front of it was a young female mage who seemed to have twisted her ankle. She had fallen and couldn't get up.

A sound escaped the legacy dragon's throat. Fire swirled in its open mouth.

"Oh no you don't!" Reina roared as she lunged forward just as the dragon spewed fire. The fire, which had been intended for the mage, closed in on both her and Reina.

"Mommy!" Emily screamed, her voice almost a shriek.

Fire filled the cavern. Emily tried to step forward, but she was pushed back by the heat. After a while, the fire subsided and she saw Reina. She was burned all over, covered in soot, and had smoke rising from her. And yet, the mage at her feet remained unharmed.

"You okay?" Reina asked the mage.

"I-I'm fine..."

"Good."

When the fire faded, Emily finally managed to catch up and exclaimed, "Mommy!"

"Emily, haul her outside! I'll deal with this."

"Okay!"

Without questioning her mother, Emily slung the female mage over her shoulder. As she had inherited her mother's strength, the little girl boasted power that would've put many adults to shame. It was Emily's job to take Reina's wine drops into town to sell, so to her, a single young woman was basically weightless.

She lifted the mage and began running back toward the dungeon's entrance.

“W-Wait!” the mage protested. “We can’t leave her behind!”

“She’ll be okay. Mommy’s the strongest hero there is!” Emily replied. Thus, she ran and ran.

Indeed, Reina was a hero. Emily’s mother was publicly acknowledged as the strongest of all of Helium’s adventurers. Emily admired Reina and put her full faith in her, so she didn’t complain when asked to get the mage out of there.

Her escape route was secure. The veterans who maintained relative calm had defeated all the monsters along the shortest path to the exit.

Emily passed through that pocket of safety and easily escaped the dungeon. When she went outside and unloaded her cargo, the young mage thanked her.

“Thank you...”

“No problem!” Emily answered with an innocent smile, then returned to the dungeon’s entrance.

She didn’t go inside, however. Despite her youth, her mother had taught her well, so she didn’t dare step inside and make the situation worse. Besides, Emily trusted her mother, so she was sure that before long, Reina would emerge like the hero she was. Thus, she waited in silence.

Adventurers fled from the dungeon one after another, but over time, the foot traffic reduced considerably. It wasn’t long before there weren’t any more people coming out.

“Mommy’s taking a long time...”

And yet, no matter how long Emily waited, Reina didn’t appear. Five minutes passed from the last escapee’s appearance, but there was no sign of Reina.

What’s taking her so long?

As she began to wonder what had happened to her mother, she spotted a figure coming out of the dungeon.

“Mommy...! Huh?”

A different adventurer had come out. He was holding his shoulder and limping as if he’d barely escaped with his life.

“You’re...not Mommy,” Emily mumbled, clearly confused.

A familiar-looking adventurer accosted the person who had emerged and asked, “Hey, are you the last one?”

“No... There’s a woman in there. She was fighting the dragon to help me escape.”

“What in the—?! Hey, you! Come back!”

Unable to bear waiting any longer, Emily dashed into the dungeon.

Why did she do that? Did she just have a gut feeling that she had to? Until then, she’d trusted her mother and had faithfully obeyed her orders to wait. However, something inside her had broken and spurred her body to act.

Emily ran down the dungeon path, one she knew well by now, back to the floor they’d been on before. The floor with iron golems—the one that always smelled of wine. There, she found Reina sitting on the ground with her back against the wall. Next to her, the legacy dragon was in the midst of disappearing.

Emily’s fears were entirely unfounded after all. Of course her mother hadn’t lost to a dragon.

“Mommy?!” Emily exclaimed as she ran toward her mother. But suddenly, her feet stopped.

She couldn't believe it. The sight before her eyes was just too much to bear. There was no mistaking the fact that Reina had defeated the dragon. But in return, she had been gravely wounded. Her legs, known for their ferocious kicks, were clearly broken. Her left arm was so burned that it had nearly turned to ash. Plus, there was a hole in her stomach with fresh blood flowing from it, meaning she must have been gouged by the dragon's claws.

Emily ran over to Reina, who was so heavily wounded that the girl hesitated to even hug her.

"Mommy! Mooommy!"

"Don't...scream..."

"But... But..."

"Emily, is...everyone okay?" Reina asked as she gazed at her daughter.

"Huh?" Emily mumbled. She was left speechless for a moment, but she finally confirmed, "Everyone's...okay. Yeah."

"Good. Glad to hear it," Reina said with a grin, showing her teeth. Despite her stature, her smile was more heroic than any other adventurer's. That never changed, even as the flame of her life began to waver.

"Mommy..."

Tears streamed down Emily's face. Then, larger tears poured out as if a dam inside her had burst.

"Don't cry. Cry later, Emily."

"Huh?"

"Can you...carry me out? If you leave me here...all my things are gonna turn into outsiders. You...understand, right?"

“Y-Yeah.”

“Take me to where people are. Can you...do that for me?”

“...Yes, ma’am!”

“Good. Let’s go.”

Emily gritted her teeth, forcefully wiped the tears away, and picked up her mother. She gasped as a sudden realization hit her like a ton of bricks. Reina was light. Unbelievably light, even. She’d carried Reina home when she was blackout drunk many times before, but never had she been this light. Frankly, it was...jarring just how light she was now compared to then.

Tears blurred Emily’s vision once more, making it difficult for her to see much of anything. The little girl no longer understood a thing at that point.

I have to get Mommy out of the dungeon. As long as I can get her out...

Wholly devoted to that one goal, Emily carried Reina along the path out of the cave.

“Emily... Are you gonna fight in dungeons when you grow up?”

“Just wait. I’ll take you to a doctor.”

“If you do...make sure you don’t push yourself. Pushing yourself...won’t just kill you.”

“You’re the strongest, Mommy. The strongest! You’re the strongest hero ever!”

“It’ll...get everyone else killed too, so...”

Emily didn’t hear what Reina said after that. Watched over by the solemn adventurers who’d come to check on things, the little girl obeyed her mother’s last request and dragged her corpse out from the dungeon.

Outside, under the blue sky, Reina's expression remained as powerful and heroic as it had ever been.



On B3 of Silicon, Emily ran as fast as she could. She had no hammer, nor anything else to use as a weapon. Powerless to fight, she ran with a crowd of zombies behind her. Those zombies were outsiders from B2 of Nihonium, and they numbered fifty in total.

She ran madly until she found the person she'd been looking for.

Yoda...

A woman had fallen next to Ryota. She was the mage Rosa, who needed to be rescued due to the effects of the magic storm.

Ryota was in grave danger, but he didn't try to run. He had a resolute look in his eyes, the look of someone desperately trying to overcome near-impossible odds.

Tears flowed out from Emily's eyes upon taking in that sight. Ryota reminded her of her mother, and not just now, either. She always saw her mother in him, as he was strong and cool just like her... They always acted detached, but when their switch was flipped, they'd work themselves half to death for the sake of others.

Emily cried at the sight of Ryota doing just that. She sniffled and wiped away her tears.

"Yoda!" Emily screamed.

When Ryota spotted her, followed by the horde of zombies, his face lit up.

After transferring the zombies to him, Emily ran even faster. Behind her, a magic circle glowed. Amid the magic storm, Ryota's special bullets spewed fire.

The outsiders that had once taken Emily's mother from her now served as a source of strength for Ryota.

Mommy...

The face Ryota made upon saving Rosa overlapped with Emily's last memory of her mother. For the first time since she'd lost her, Emily had truly pushed herself. After spending her entire life playing it safe, never going beyond fighting slimes on B1 of Tellurium, she'd plunged into the depths of Silicon, a place where her attacks were useless.

That was the second time she'd disobeyed her mother, but she didn't regret it one bit. She knew she would do it again if she had to—because she was happy to be of assistance to Ryota Sato, someone who so closely resembled her mother.

Wiping away the tears in her eyes with the back of her hand, Emily silently smiled.



Afterword

Nice to meet you all. Or, to those who already know me, it's been a while!

I'm Nazuna Miki, a Taiwanese light novelist.

Thank you so much for picking up *My Unique Skill Makes Me OP Even at Level 1*.

To summarize this work in a sentence, I would say it's the perfect reborn-in-another-world fantasy in which our hero dies of exhaustion while working for a corrupt corporation, is reborn in a new world with a unique skill, and essentially cheat-codes his way into an overpowered new life where he can get it right this time.

How can I call it the "perfect" one, you ask? Well, it received first place in *Shousetsuka ni Narou's* quarterly competition. In other words, it was the most-liked story during that three-month period. I can say with confidence as the author that it is a fun reborn-in-another-world story, and I think the ranking has confirmed that, so I'd like you to rest easy in your decision to read this book.

Now, I'd like to put the outline aside and excite you with some details about the story itself. The world our hero finds himself in is one in which every single raw material comes from monster drops in dungeons. Any raw material that you can think of comes from monster drops. The bean sprouts that supported our hero through his corporate slave life, bunnies' beloved carrots, and the Japanese staple, rice...

All of it comes from dungeons!

Defeat a slime, you get bean sprouts!

Defeat a rock with a human face, you get dandelions!

Defeat a giant gorilla, you get tuna!

In this world, adventurers act as both hunters and gatherers when they head into dungeons, and the quality and quantity of things dropped (produced) depend on the adventurer's stats. Adventurers with the highest drop stat, A, are blessed with great quality and quantity, so their income is only limited by the number of monsters they can defeat.

The unique skill given to the protagonist is his drop rates of S! He's the only person in the world with drops better than A. Thanks to that, his drops are both higher quality and more plentiful than those of other adventurers, and he's even able to receive drops that shouldn't exist.

With this unmatched power, our hero rises in his new world. No longer will he be exploited the way he was as a corporate slave; this new world grants him the opportunity to make up for all the wrongs done to him in the past.

I plan to stick firmly to this concept throughout the rest of the story, so if you enjoyed what you've read so far, I'd be delighted if you bought the next one.

The story itself will follow in the footsteps of games like *Minecraft*, in which the protagonist will use his power to gain new rewards, which he will then use in turn to gain yet more power and obtain greater rewards, repeating this process to add to his assets.

You might even liken it to the "Straw Millionaire" legend, where a person gets richer by making smart trades. I think people who like such elements will really enjoy this story, so please do give it a try!

Of course, this work continues to be published on *Shousetsuka ni Narou* as

well. The web novel doesn't come with illustrations, but it *does* contain chapters 31 and beyond, so you can read ahead all you like there!

Finally, I have many thanks to give.

To Subachi-sama, who illustrated all of the characters, including the protagonist, heroines Emily, Eve, and Erza, and more so beautifully.

To my editor, K-sama, who took my awkward writing—the result of momentum and zeal alone—and collected it in a presentable book format.

To the K Light Novel Books' editorial department, who made this publication a reality.

And to all of you, who have read and supported my work thus far.

I offer my deepest thanks to each and every person involved in this work.

Now, I'll put down my pen. Though it ultimately depends on the sales figures, I pray that the next volume of this new-life-in-another-world fantasy will someday reach your eagerly waiting hands.

Respectfully yours,

Nazuna Miki

July 2017

Author: Nazuna Miki

Formerly a wannabe voice actor, now a light novelist who's a huge fan of parson's nose.

If I was transported to the same world as Ryota, I'd find the floor that drops parson's nose and live my life there.

Illustrator: Subachi

I'm on Twitter.

Sometimes I tweet about art streams, so you should follow me.

Lately, I've been really into this game called *PUBG*. Winner Winner Chicken Dinner!

My Unique Skill Makes Me OP Even at Level 1 vol 1

KODANSHA COMICS Digital Edition

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